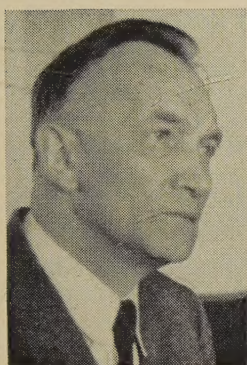
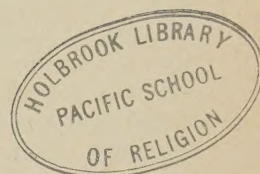


The Pulpit

A Journal of Contemporary Preaching



Josef L. Hromadka:

CHRISTIAN WITNESS

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JOHN CAPPS IRWIN **2** CHRISTMAS IS CREDIBLE!



By John C. Irwin

CHRISTMAS IS

HAVE you read the Christmas stories recently? All of them, one after the other? There is the visit of Gabriel to the maid, Mary; the tenderness of Joseph, who took her to wife even though she was found to be with child; the journey to Bethlehem and the lowly birth in the manger; the heavenly choir and the shepherds whose night-tuned ears heard the angelic anthem; the Wise Men following a strange star across many miles and giving rich gifts to a penniless Babe; an old man and woman, Simeon and Anna, seeing in the child the promised deliverance of Israel; the flight from Herod's jealous wrath. Such are the lovely and deathless stories we read in Scripture and sing in carol each year at Christmas.

However, it has been our lot to live in a day which finds it hard to believe the Christmas stories. A realistic, tough-minded, skeptical age sees no angels, hears no heavenly music, cannot believe that a child could be conceived without a human father. Our mood has been well characterized by Conrad Aiken, who tells how Mary in later years went to the cross to take down her son for burial and found the burden strangely light because it was upheld by angel wings. Today, he suggests, "We guess no angels."

A Skeptical Age

We live in an age which has lost the sense of wonder. We are earthbound. We believe only what we can see, smell, touch and explain. To the ancient question, "What is real?" our age replies, "What you can put in a test tube—or in a bank!" One thinks of Luther's comment on Gabriel's greeting: "Hail, Mary, full of grace." "What can we make of that!" exclaimed Luther. "A purse full of gold we can understand, but what can we make of a maid full of grace!"

Although each year we sing the Christmas carols with delight and read the Christmas stories with joy, we do so with only part of our minds. With the thinking part we doubt that it ever happened so. When we were children we lived in a world where fairies, elves and other charming

creatures were credible; but now we are grown. Angels and miracles have gone with the fairies. Yet I suspect many of us are like Thomas Hardy who in his mature years professed no Christian faith, but recalled in a poem that in his childhood an elder on Christmas Eve told how at midnight all the oxen fell on their knees.

So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
"Come; see the oxen kneel,"

I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so.¹

How much more in these tragic times millions must wish they could hear these stories with the childlike faith of other years!

We Can Believe

It is my purpose to affirm that we *can* believe the Christmas stories! The way to do this is to read them as poetry, not as science.

Today we are coming to a new and liberating realization that all truth cannot be put in scientific categories. Mankind has rightly given great honor to its scientists and technologists. Science has enriched life so greatly that we have assumed all experience would open to its methodology. Indeed, not only physical nature, but many aspects of human nature and social experience have yielded their secrets to the scientific approach. However, we have come to see that much truth escapes the formulations of science, and this applies to perhaps the most important truth—the world of meaning. Thus Thornton Wilder in *Our Town* has Emily come back from her grave on the hill to relive a girlish birthday. She tries in vain to capture the attention of her parents and point out to them the beauty and wonder of each moment of life, but they are too involved in the worry and care of the moment to see its meaning. And Emily, who has just been released from her coffin, exclaims, "How blind they are. They live in a box!"

Today there is a new birth of interest in the arts, for we have come to see that the artist—poet, painter, dramatist, novelist—no less than the scientist, presents reality and truth. For example, a scientist might tell us that a sunset is

¹Thomas Hardy, "The Oxen," *Collected Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 1925). Used by permission.

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*The Poet Also Helps to
Reveal God's Truth*

CREDIBLE!

ethereal vibration in wave lengths ranging from .000040 to .000072 centimeters caused by the refraction of light. But Lew Sarett, looking at the flaming west, cries:

God is at the anvil, beating out the sun;
Where the molten metal spills
At his forge among the hills,
He has hammered out the glory of a day that's done.²

Which man, scientist or poet, gives us the better understanding of a sunset? If we attempt to express the whole truth about the setting sun in terms of a spectroscope, we suppress the most important aspect of the problem—the respect in which we are different from a spectroscope. Poetry and the other arts give us an approach to reality and truth no less significant than science.

All this is perhaps an overly-long detour to prepare us to receive the idea that the truth of the Bible will be revealed to us if we read it as poetry rather than as science. Thus Tennyson's "In Memorium" reminds us:

... truth embodied in a tale
Shall enter in at lowly doors

Which he may read that binds the sheaf,
Or builds the house, or digs the grave,
And those wild eyes that watch the wave
In roarings round the coral reef.

Truth and the Arts

But someone says, can we seriously receive a work of creative imagination as Truth? In this connection it is instructive to hear Professor Tsanoff (in *Ways of Genius*) remind us that it is idle to speculate whether the days in Holland were always as dark as they appear in a Rembrandt, or whether all Spaniards were as elongated and grave as the figures in an El Greco. These paintings, he remarks, were not intended to be *correct* but *true*.

It would be equally foolish to debate the truth of Jesus' story of the forgiving father and the prodigal son. Has any archeologist ever found the city in which this father lived? Do we know the son's name and the date of his birth? Can it be scientifically demonstrated that such an incident ever took place? But who cares! Or for that matter, did it ever occur to you to ask such questions

²Lew Sarett, *Collected Poems* (New York: Henry Holt, 1941). Used by permission.

before accepting the truth about God's forgiving love which this story was meant to convey?

What then can we believe from the Christmas stories? One truth is this: *At a moment in history God broke into the world in redeeming power.* John's Gospel puts this truth philosophically; Matthew and Luke put it poetically. "The light shines in the darkness . . . The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth." "To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

The Meaning of Christmas

Again, *God's power needed nothing from man except response.* The virgin mother, the manger birth, the helpless babe, the futile wrath of Herod—all this proclaims how little God needs the power and pretense of men. That is why Paul declares, "The foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men." The shepherds and Wise Men did not create Christmas, they received it; and what they did we are asked to do. "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened."

The supreme truth revealed by the Christmas stories is that *God's character is love.* This is the heart of the Christian gospel. "God so loved the world that he gave . . ."

"Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased."

Accelerator vs. Brake

ONE day we were riding along in the car when two children leaned over the back of the front seat and began asking questions about the controls. What was that pedal on the left? one of them asked, and we said that was the clutch. And the one in the middle? That was the brake. And the one on the right? That was the accelerator. And then they moved one step further. What would happen, they asked, if you let the clutch alone, pushed the accelerator down to the floorboards, and stepped on the brake as hard as you could? We replied that it would probably depend on which was stronger, the engine or the brake; and as I spoke, it occurred to me that the situation they imagined was one frequently encountered in human living. The accelerator against the brake. The instincts, impulses, desires, and dreams against the conscience, the scruples, the doubts and the fears. One part of us says to go ahead, and the other part of us cries out for a halt; and crushed between the two conflicting wills, we find ourselves ineffective, impotent, exhausted.

But when we have really come to ourselves, accepted ourselves, and dedicated ourselves, the conflict is ended. The brake is off, the clutch is in, and the accelerator is set for smooth and steady progress toward the goal which we have chosen. There is joy in living now. There is glory. There is hope and freedom and peace.—Roy M. Pearson, Dean, Andover Newton Theological School.

The Christian Witness for Today's World

Whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? I John 5:4-5.

I HAVE been asked to speak on whatever I consider most essential and what is really on my heart. And I am going to speak to you spontaneously to make as understandable as possible our own position and the common mission we have to perform in the world of today.

What is the witness we, the members of the Christian church and believers in Jesus Christ, have to carry on? We are not approaching this world with some kind of abstract ideology. A real witness is no abstract, rational ideology. It is a witness to what the Lord of heaven and earth has done unto us—what he has said to us and what he commands us to do.

The trouble with Christian churches today consists in this temptation to reduce what we call Christian faith to formulas, definitions and categories. That is the temptation of the world. Christian people find it easier just to carry on abstract ideologies than to be a real witness of the Lord unto the world.

The Light of Faith

Faith in Jesus Christ, as we understand it, opens our eyes to the world in which we live. It opens our eyes to men and women who are next to us. And we cannot possibly understand the gospel of Jesus Christ unless we simultaneously understand the man who is next to us. Faith in Jesus Christ is like a light, like lightning; it cuts across our human lines and our human society and thus makes bright what had been dark before, understandable what was not understandable before.

What we call the faith in Jesus Christ has nothing to do with abstract formulas about the world. It has to do with a reality of God himself who has, in his grace, come to meet us where we are. And that is the faith of which the Apostle John speaks in his letter. This faith overcomes the world. It

does not mean that we Christians should overcome the world in some kind of ideological warfare or even in some kind of church political warfare. It means that the world—the people—listen and understand and go forward. It is very difficult to do that.

It is very easy to come together on Sundays, to perform some ecclesiastical duty, to repeat old formulas and definitions. However, it is very difficult to go right into the world in which we live and to make, with the grace of God, our faith real and to make real, for the people, the presence of God himself—the God of justice, and the God of faith and forgiveness. This is the faith that overcomes the world. I cannot speak about the world of today unless I speak about this faith, about this message and witness we have to carry on. This message has to be interpreted and reinterpreted every day anew. It has to be made real and relevant to all the people.

We are in the world and we cannot meet our God in Jesus Christ elsewhere than in this world. That is exactly the meaning of the incarnation of Jesus Christ as I understand it. He is right where we—poor sinners, helpless people—are, and still we are his children, his brothers and his instruments.

Understanding Other People

What does it mean—the world of today? It means, first of all, our small world in which we live. We cannot understand the world in general unless we understand the world in which we live. Before you start to speak about our witness in the world today, think about your responsibility to speak, to bring witness to the world in which we live. The world? It is I. It is you. It is my wife, my husband, my son, my neighbor. This is the world I have to understand: this concrete world, not the world in general but the world in which I really live.

Ask yourselves, do you understand the people with whom you live? Do you understand them adequately? I have come to the conclusion that often people may live together for years and not understand one another at all. They are foreign, alien to one another. Even husband and wife may live together for ten or twenty years and not understand one another because they are not interested in one another. They don't really love one another. The husband treats his wife as some kind

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of companion from whom he expects service and the wife looks at her husband as a wage earner and a man of social position. However, in the depths of humanity they are alien to one another.

From our own small world we have to try—with divine grace—to understand our children, our neighbors, the people with whom we come in contact. Here we have to start. We cannot overcome the world unless we overcome the barriers which are between ourselves—between wife and husband, between parents and children between neighbor and neighbor.

It is nonsense to speak about the danger and barrier of communism, or any other ism, if one does not understand the deepest depth of our own human mission. When we came to Evanston we came with this desire to understand one another, not as communist or anti-communist. We did not come to deal with one another in this abstract way. We came to understand one another and to give ourselves, to dedicate ourselves to one another's service.

We are all sinners and I am a very poor sinner. I don't pretend to be a spiritual or moral hero. I am just a poor sinner like anybody else. But it is really, believe me, my deep desire to get as close to the people here as it is possible. It is not easy.

Here at the Assembly of the World Council of Churches there have been many efforts to draw dividing lines between ourselves. Still, with the grace of God, I think we have gone forward. That is the impression which I will carry back to my country of Czechoslovakia. In spite of all these differences between ourselves, we have not stopped and we have not permitted ourselves to be discouraged or disillusioned.

Christian Responsibility

A Christian, a real believer in Christ, must never be discouraged and must never be disillusioned. He must start over and over again. Even the reports at the Assembly have many shortcomings. We, the people who have come here from behind the iron curtain, are dissatisfied with many drafts and with many paragraphs of these documents. However, we must not be discouraged, but rather thankful for what we have achieved. And we have to go further. That is very important at the present moment in the whole world.

Many people say, "The division of the world is so deep that it cannot be possible to overcome; there are such deep differences between ourselves that we have to yield, in a fatalistic way; we have to look for some kind of war or some kind of catastrophe which will 'solve' the problems." Now that is not the way of the Christian believer. I think we Christians have to contribute tremendously at this present moment to the world through our determination to speak together, to speak to one another, and not to cease to speak to

one another and to negotiate—if you wish to use this word—with one another and to look for some kind of preliminary arrangement for the future.

At the present moment we can only achieve preliminaries. If any statesman or diplomat wishes to arrive at some kind of final solution, he is a fool, because in this world of constant change there are no absolute solutions. There are only preliminary solutions, relative solutions. The Christian church must raise her voice so clearly that all statesmen and diplomats and responsible people will listen to it.

Don't stop talking. Don't stop trying to understand one another. And don't stop trying to get to some kind of preliminary solution and preliminary arrangement. I don't mean any cheap or easy way of life. No! On the contrary, we have to arrive at a quite definite, preliminary solution. However, after we have reached it, we must go a step forward.

A Relevant Message

That is my experience as a professor of theology. I have been a professor of theology a very long time—you would be surprised how long. In the first years of my academic career, I thought, "After I have made my class lectures ready and have written all of them, in three or four years I will have a very happy time. Then the future will be glorious." My Lord taught me differently. He told me that I cannot repeat any of my lectures in the same way. I have to speak every year a new relevant language, though it is the same message of the presence of God in Jesus Christ in this world. However, I have to speak new words just as I have to speak to my wife—*living* words. Imagine if I would speak to my wife some formulas about love and definitions which I have learned! How would she react? And if I thought, "We got married thirty years ago; we said to one another that we love one another and that's enough." No! We have to manifest our love every day anew—our devotion, our self-dedication.

So, we have to express our devotion to our neighbors in a new way every day, because life never stops. If we quit trying to interpret our attitudes to man in an everyday new way, then we stop thinking and our faith may sink away.

Need for Understanding

We have to understand the world of 1954, and we don't understand it. I know there are many people in my own country who don't understand what is going on, who think that they are still living in 1925 or 1938, and they are not strong enough to open their eyes to see what is going on. And you—do you know what is going on? Ask yourself. I am not here to pass judgment or to moralize with you. Not at all. However, I must raise this question. Do you understand what is really going on in the world?

We cannot ignore the march of events. We cannot ignore the great efforts of the people in other countries to reorganize their countries on a new level, on a new basis, on new principles. That is exactly what is going on in my country. We are living no more in a liberal, democratic state. We are living within a socialistic state, and we have to understand it in the most constructive and positive way. We must assist, purify, pass judgment, say a word of criticism when necessary.

Starting With Christ

Certainly your ways are different from our ways. Your system is different from our system. It would be nonsense on my part if I said that you must go the same way we are going. No. It would be unfair and wrong. You have to do your work in your own way, on the basis of your own heritage and tradition. However, you have to understand what is going on in other countries in order to be fair.

We have to start from the unity of humanity under the grace of God present in Jesus Christ. There have been tendencies, even at the Assembly, to start from our divisions and differences, to say: "You are communists, from a communistic coun-

try, and we are Americans; let us start from our divisions and our differences. . . ."

We have to start from the unity of humanity, from the unity of mankind. Jesus Christ came into this world to offer himself, to sacrifice himself, to hang on the cross for the whole of humanity, for all men. Only in the light of the living gospel and of our living faith can we look at our differences and hope for some kind of preliminary and relevant solution.

We individual Christians and individual congregations can do much. Very much! We in our country and you in this country. This very worship service should be a kind of mutual covenant that we ought to pledge ourselves here at this moment to do, with the grace and help of God in Christ, what we are responsible to do.

Freedom, perfect freedom, is freedom in responsibility and in love. There is no freedom without responsibility and without love. Only if we are free in our responsibility before God can we bring a real freedom to all humanity. Only then can we overcome in some measure the difficulties which are around us, "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith."

The Beatitudes

Paraphrased by Herbert J. Guth

First Church (Reformed), Albany, New York

BLESSED are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Happy are those who are humble, who are not overconcerned with their importance, for they have God's approval.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Happy are those who have a godlike sympathy toward their fellow men. They shall have the assurance that God cares for them.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Happy are those who realize that they do not know everything and are willing to learn from God. They shall be the great leaders.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Happy are those who want God's approval as desperately as a dying man, stumbling toward a desert mirage, wants a drink, or as a starving man longs for a crust of bread. They shall receive that which they seek.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

Happy are those who are always alert to the needs of others and do what they can to meet

those needs. They shall find that God will take care of their needs.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Happy are those who do only what God wants done. They shall have the greatest reward God can give—Himself.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Happy are those who can express constructive good will toward one another. They are God's right-hand men.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Happy are those who are ridiculed for living their lives on a high spiritual plane. They are approved by God.

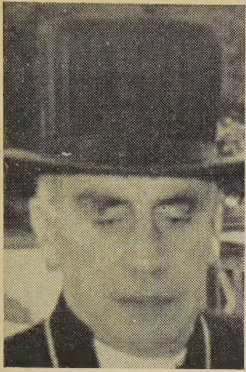
Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Happy are those who are criticized and ridiculed and the subject of gossip because of their attempt to be Christlike. That ridicule has been heaped on others. Do not be disturbed about it, because God will give you a great reward.

The Dangerous Presence

By Yngve Brilioth

Matthew 11:20-24.



THEN he began to upbraid the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You shall be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I tell you that it shall be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you."

THIS text speaks to us of the little towns in Galilee where the Lord had preached, where he had done mighty works, but yet they had not repented and received his message in their hearts. In the words of the text, the presence of Jesus comes near to us, it grows before our eyes. He stands before us mightier, more severe than we often think of him. His image has often been painted to us as too meek and lowly, too unmanly. He meets us here in an almost terrifying strength and majesty. And we are reminded that he must have said much and done much of which no record has been preserved to us. It is strange that just these three towns should be mentioned. I suppose that Chorazin is now hardly more than a heap of ruins on the shore of Gennesaret. This is the only place in the gospel where it is mentioned. Bethsaida is certainly mentioned—but only here are we told of deeds that Jesus had worked there. Capernaum is the only place of which it is said that Jesus dwelt there. Did the people ever seriously think of that? But above all we must wonder when we hear what Jesus claims for himself—it is more than a human claim. He appears here with a strong consciousness of his unique vocation that God, who alone has power to exalt to heaven—and to cast into hell—is present in

him; that his presence was God's own presence—the blessed and terrifying presence of the Eternal Lord.

The Judgment of Christ

Let us try to say something today of the dangerous presence. The presence of Jesus was dangerous for those places where he lived during his time on earth, for those people whom he met in his way. It was the hour of their visitation—it was their great chance. The day when Jesus came near to them became for them the day of estrangement, the day of judgment. Who would today know the name of Pilate if he had not pronounced the sentence over the Savior of the world? Chorazin and Bethsaida, their names have been preserved to posterity only because it was over them that Jesus spoke his terrible woe.

What did he mean when he spoke thus of the places where he had performed his mighty deeds? What was his intention? Did he wish perhaps to give those that heard him, one last chance? Did he use such harsh words in order to waken them to serious consideration of this state? And does it not seem strange to us that the judgment of our Savior is passed upon whole communities? There must have been many who had not met him in such a way that they could make a decision for or against him. Surely there were little children playing in the streets of Chorazin or Bethsaida, there were old people who were not able to hear his words—how could they share in the responsibility when they had not consciously turned away from him?

Conquering Progress

We are here faced by a mystery which we cannot penetrate. It may remind us that although God is in the first instance seeking the individual, and it is up to the individual to decide for or against God, still the individual is never alone or isolated; he is always a member of a community, a congregation, a parish, and because of that every man has a responsibility also for others. The spiritual condition of the individual is never something that concerns only himself. He can make it easier or more difficult for others to believe, he can carry others with him—on the road to salvation or the road to perdition. Thus we have reason

YNGVE BRILIOTH, Archbishop of Upsala and Primate of the Church of Sweden, was one of the most important personages at the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches, as chairman of its Faith and Order Commission. The ecumenical movement counts him as a leading architect, who took part in the Amsterdam and Lund meetings, and also in the conferences at Stockholm, Lausanne, Oxford and Edinburgh which laid the groundwork for the World Council. He is chairman of the board of the Ecumenical Review, an official Council organ, and author of two books on the history of the Church of Sweden.

to consider what it means, that a place, a town, a people can be brought near to the Lord, can be sought by him in a special way—and call down judgment over itself by turning its back on him.

It is not only in the little towns on the shore of Gennesaret that Jesus has wrought mighty deeds. The whole history of the church tells us of the deeds of Jesus: how he has met people after people and has entered into their lives with his sanctifying, purifying and healing power; how he has infused into their lands something of his spirit; and how he has met the individual, generation after generation, with his saving love. Verily, the history of the mighty deeds of Jesus stretches through all the centuries after his own time. It soon encompasses all the people of the earth. In our own time he is continuing his conquering progress into the lands of the gentiles, in order to show his power to help, heal and renew among peoples that have not yet heard his name.

Hour of Decision

But there are also in the history of the peoples fatal hours when it is decided if Christ shall remain with them. It is a dreadful moment, when a people which has met Jesus once turns away from him. In our time, it seems as if, at least for some peoples which have been used to call themselves Christian, that hour had arrived. And here certainly no people has a right to look down upon others.

I am thinking of my own beloved church and people of Sweden. Certainly, the Lord has come near to us, has wrought mighty deeds among us. Every church in our land—as in other lands—that raises its spire with the sign of the cross, is a deed that Jesus has wrought. In many ways we can see the impact of his Spirit upon the life of society. Also many who in our time refuse to confess, or dare not confess his name, have been inspired by him, and are unknowingly serving him. And the most important part of the spiritual history of our people, and any people, can never be written because it deals with the hidden activity of the Spirit, in the world of the souls—where he has met sinful men with the conquering and recreating power of his love.

Divine Messenger

Certainly our people and the Christian people of this great land of America cannot plead that they have not the Lord. He has come near to them in manifold ways. But his presence is a dangerous presence. He is not a teacher among others—he is the messenger of God Almighty to every people.

When Christ looks at the Christians today, what does he see? I am chiefly thinking of the countries in Europe where his deeds have been wrought in so many centuries. What does he see? Does he see peoples that thank him for his gifts and strive to come nearer to him—to walk in his ways? Or does he see something very different—peoples that slowly turn their backs to him, that look on the commandments of God as old superstitions from which a new generation strives to free itself as

it constantly becomes more and more occupied with worldly cares and shallow amusements, that is hardly able any more to discern the heavenly voice from all the loud voices that demand its attention.

Searching Questions

I know that the picture which is presented by American Christianity is different; and it is good—and perhaps humiliating—to us to hear how the churches here increase their membership, and to witness that Christianity is an increasing power in public life. I am thinking not least of the remarkable address which the President gave us when he visited the World Council of Churches in Evanston. But here also there is, I think, room for searching questions. How far is the church membership and church attendance a personal engagement or a social convention?

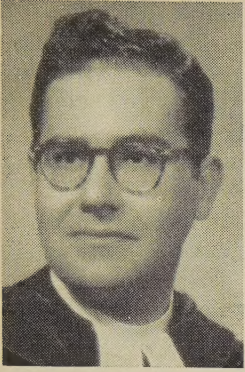
And we in the churches and countries of Europe certainly have reason to ask ourselves: Is the presence of the Lord which we have experienced in past centuries about to be changed into judgment over a generation that does not know Christ? Perhaps we see the dawn of a new era when spiritual matters will again become intensely important. We need the encouragement, the understanding and not least the prayers of American Christians.

God is not far away from any one of us. He seeks us in the means of grace—in the preaching of the word, in the sacraments, in the life of the church. No one can grow up without acquiring some knowledge of God's deeds in Christ—that that is the case in my own country is a matter for profound gratitude. But now, if ever, we need to experience the presence of Jesus.

A Universal Message

Finally, the text of today has a message to us all. Are you a friend of the Lord? What does his presence mean to you? Are you, perhaps, one of those courteous but cold friends of the Lord who do not wish to break with him but are very afraid of letting him come really close? Then you should know that you are not among his true friends if you grudge him the only sacrifice that he really desires—your poor, sinful heart. He has sought you from infancy, through baptism, through Christian teaching. He seeks you in every service of the church. You cannot escape the presence of Christ. But that means not only blessing and grace—it may mean judgment. He who does not with an open heart receive the blessing, he must be subject to his judgment. Are you afraid of seeing him face to face—so that he can show you your real state, crush you with his judgment, and at the same time really become your Savior—release you from the bondage of sin, self-centeredness, empty formality—and let you share the glorious liberty of the children of God?

God give you grace to seek and find the presence of the Lord—and may this presence be to you a blessed presence for time and eternity. Amen.



Christmas-in-Particular

By Theodore A. Gill

EVERYBODY celebrates Christmas. Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief—we all observe the day. Doctor, lawyer, merchant man, chief—everyone remembers. Christians lead the way, of course, for a dim recollection lingers in the public mind that the holiday has some submerged connection with the Christian story. But Christians are by no means the only celebrants of the season. Faithful adherents to other religions are keeping the day, too. Visiting Jewish families, we would find preparations afoot in many of them for Christmas parties and presents. Down in Chinatown, Christmas trees will find their way into Buddhist and Confucianist homes. Hindus and Mohammedans will give gifts and exchange the season's greetings.

Nor are the followers of the great world religions the only ones who will celebrate. Even those who disclaim all religious ties and who take satisfaction in having disabused themselves of the foolish notions of the faithful—even these keep Christmas. A communist family may be as caught up in the excitement of the season as the Republicans and Democrats around, and their greetings as merry as anyone's.

Well now, what kind of event can this be in which will join men, women and children of every shade of opinion and every slant of attitude in our Western world? What magic occasion is it that can gather into its exciting whirl Christian and non-Christian, religionist and secularist, capitalist and communist?

Christmas-in-General

Obviously, any observance shared by religionists and non-religionists, Christians and non-Christians, may not be too specifically religious or Christian. It will have to be as general as possible if it is to be universally observed. And indeed, Christmas as we keep it today is as general as

possible. As far as the public celebration of Christmas is concerned, the specifically Christian elements of the season are soft-pedalled in favor of some strong, non-controversial note on which all voices can agree. The Bethlehem story still has a part in the symbols of the season: the baby, the angels, the star, the shepherds and wise men.

Christmas now has a much more general basis than was afforded by the old gospel story of a borrowed manger and a baby King. After all, the celebrants would be relatively few if limited to those who rejoiced at the birthday of their Lord. The celebrants are many, however, because Christmas is no longer limited to those who worship a newborn King. Instead, Christmas today is the celebration of the fact of goodness and gladness in the world. Who cannot rejoice that there is such a thing as happiness on earth?

Everyone — Christian, Jew, Mohammedan, theist, humanist, atheist—everyone can agree on this: that kindness and charity are lovely things. Everyone can join in celebrating them on the day set aside to their honor.

Wider Recognition

You see what has happened? Everyone can celebrate Christmas today because everyone has decided that Christmas is really a holiday in honor of goodness and gladness and love and laughter. We think we see now that what the old Christmas story was trying to get across was that joy and peace are possible and should be glorified. While that important truth was all smothered and camouflaged in the gospel terms, of course only members of the Christian sect could celebrate this special day. But now that we see what the real point of the story was, behind all its dear, quaint words about angels and a beggar-born Messiah—now that we see that all Christmas means is that virtue is good and should be remembered at least once a year, why everyone can celebrate Christmas.

All this is Christmas in general. It is Christmas in its broadest definition, opening itself up to the widest possible observance and giving the least possible offense to anyone.

Now mind you, the general observance of Christmas-in-general is not to be despised. It is no small thing for a whole culture to give itself once a year to the glorification of the creative, humane, gentle aspects of human nature. Other voices have tried to hawk opposite honors. Even

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those who are left dissatisfied with the scope of Christmas-in-general must be grateful for this general, periodic attention to the claims of love and peace. Indeed, there have been Christian thinkers who have satisfied themselves with this whole conception of Christmas-in-general, and have made out good cases for its sufficiency. For them the season is an annual crisis in our improvement—a time for loving in honor of love rejoicing in honor of joy, pacifying in honor of peace, being generally good on this day dedicated to the idea of general goodness. Christmas-in-general.

The Essence of Christmas

Many Christians will approve and appreciate all this, but will not be satisfied. And they will be dissatisfied because Christmas-in-general does not go far enough for them. This Christian wants Christmas-in-particular. He analyzes Christmas differently than does the rest of society. When he boils up the whole idea, and drains off non-essentials, he is left with quite a different essence of Christmas. For him the gospel story is not an unpalatable element to be subordinated or eliminated in favor of the wider public. Instead, this gospel story is *the* essential part of the celebration; it is the reason for it all.

Christ is the essence of Christmas. Not goodness or gladness or love or laughter, but *Christ*. He is not just one among several charming but superfluous elements in the traditional observance of Christmas. He *is* Christmas.

Because *the* little child is born, we and the universe celebrate the day. Keeping Christmas-in-particular means that we glorify on that day not goodness in general, but the goodness of God; not love in general, but the love of God; not peace in general, but the peace of God. And we honor these things not in the abstract, but in the particular: as they are manifested toward us in the birth of Jesus Christ.

This is the claim of Christians-in-particular. Don't press them too hard on details. Exactly what happened at Bethlehem is bright but indistinct through shining mystery. Poetry, when forced, congeals; and the dogmatist freezes its life and truth into forbidding fictions. But *something* happened once upon a time and that is why we celebrate a day. God came to earth, we say; eternity entered time, heaven invaded history, the divine became human, the perpendicular met the horizontal.

God's Great Gift

But again, don't press too hard on details. Theology too, when forced, congeals. Theological sophistication literalizes into absurdity as quickly as does the poem of a wondrous birth. The inspired singer at first, and all the generations of Christian scholars since have been trying to tell us that something happened a long time ago that made all the difference in the world.

Christ is born, and we know God is for us. He has not arranged a festival in which we can put our best foot forward. He has done that himself.

He didn't wait for our seasonal afflatus, but took steps on our behalf, in our favor. Christ was born, and nothing has been the same since. Christmas-in-particular is a day set aside to hymn the glory of God who did something once which tells us now more than we had hoped to hear, more than we dared to expect.

It is because this fundamental note has fallen out of the popular keeping of Christmas that Christians must be seriously dissatisfied with Christmas-in-general. There are other criticisms leveled against the way we keep the season these days. We have commercialized Christmas beyond all conscience, it is said—and truly said. Our parties degenerate: Bing, bangles and binges.

But it isn't so much the commercialization of the day, nor yet the hilarity of its celebration which should most disturb Christians. What should alarm us is the fact that the Christ has been dropped out of Christmas. The particular reason for the day, the true center of the celebration, has been abandoned in favor of Christmas-in-general. Instead of giving ourselves to the reverent adoration of God's gift of himself, we celebrate our own most genial, generous impulses.

Light of the World

Laurence Housman once produced his nativity play, *Bethlehem*, for a two week run in the great hall of the University of London. The British censor insisted, however, that the Virgin Mary was not to speak, nor could the Christ child appear. To get around this last restriction an electric light was hidden in the manger, its subdued radiance representing the Child supposed to be lying there. One of the last scenes in the play called for all the stage lights to be lowered until only the glow from the manger shown on the stage. It was an effective moment, except at one performance when some confused stage-hand turned off the manger-bulb along with all the others leaving the stage in total darkness. Then through the darkness and silence cut the manager's fierce, indignant whisper: "Hey—you've switched off Jesus." On the very day when we should recall how first the Light of the World shone among men, we switch him off. That is what Christmas-in-general does. It lets the Bethlehem story shine only in the reflected glory of our own virtues.

But Christmas-in-particular asks us to go at the thing the other way around, and to let the light of Christ illumine all the derivative sentiments and customs of Christmas. Do we read Scriptures today? Then let us not read as if this were merely a traditional part of Christmas; let us read to discover why Christmas is, and to meet again the Word who came to the world that marvelous night so long ago. Do we sing carols today? Then let us not sing as if these were merely a traditional part of a traditional celebration of a tradition; let us sing to the honor and glory of the new-born King, whose lordship we express in our lives. Do we give gifts today: then let us not give them out of custom or even from the goodness of our hearts; but let us give them as sacraments of that manger

gift. Let us give them in his name, remembering Sigrid Undset's admonition:

He has given us the sun and the moon and the stars, the earth with its forests and mountains and oceans and all that lives and moves upon them. He has given us all green things and everything that blossoms and bears fruit—and all that we quarrel about and that we have misused. And to save us from our own foolishness and from all our sins he came down to earth and gave himself. *Venite adoremus Dominum.**

All of this is what is meant by Christmas-in-particular. Of course, Christmas-in-particular does not end with our reverence and adoration of

*Sigrid Undset. *Christmas and Twelfth Night* (Longmans, Green, 1941). Used by permission.



God's Two-Edged Sword

By F. W. Schroeder

The word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12.

THIS word of God, to which the writer of Hebrews ascribes such piercing, penetrating power, is obviously something more than a word about God such as one might find in a theological treatise or a religious discourse. It is more, too, than any printed words found in the Bible, even though these were written by men moved by the Spirit of God. The word of God is always something more than any written or spoken words.

It is the word by which the world was created when at the beginning of time God said, "Let there be, and there was." It is the word that became flesh in the fullness of time in the life and ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is the word that compelled prophets to speak and apostles to bear witness concerning the mighty deeds of God in history. It is the word that confronts us in and through the recorded words of Scripture, the spoken word in the sermon, and the acted word of the sacraments. Or it may confront us in some exalted moment of vision quite independent of sermon or sacrament; for like the wind that blows where it wills, so the word of the Lord also comes to men in strange places and at unexpected times.

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Christ. As in every other contact with him, some difference will be made in those who approach the manger. The infant King himself will require of us that change of attitude and direction which is the whole content of Christmas-in-general.

No participant in Christmas-in-general could lift up higher requirements for the Christmas spirit than do Christians who celebrate Christmas-in-particular. Only now these things are not done for their own sakes, nor even for our own sakes, but in homage to our King whose constancy outlasts all seasons and depends upon none; in obedience to our Lord whose requirements are hourly not annual; in gratitude to our God whose coming at Christmas is our chief joy.

For Universal Bible Sunday

Now the first thing to be said about the divine word is that it cuts deep. Notice that it is described as "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow." These are daring claims. If they stood alone one might dismiss them as an outburst of apostolic-ecstasy. But they do not stand alone. Centuries earlier the prophet Jeremiah had spoken in a similar vein when he declared: "Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?" Isaiah spoke in equally glowing terms. When he issued his invitation to the thirsty to drink freely of the water of life, he concluded with the divine assurance:

"So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and prosper in the thing for which I sent it."

Though the language may be different, the substance is the same in each instance. What shall we say to this? Is this fact or is it fiction?

One cannot be too sure that such claims are always accepted on face value, even in Christian circles. For example, is it not rather strange that the church, which is in the habit of admonishing men and nations not to place their confidence in horses and chariots, bullets and battleships, sometimes seems to ignore its own counsel? With a feverish busyness it goes about setting up agencies and organizations to curb this evil and right that wrong, as though these were its only weap-

ons of slaying the dragons of iniquity and lawlessness. Note, too, how much emphasis the church places on promotion and publicity, and how much time is given to conferences and committees.

Even the pulpit, from which the word is proclaimed, betrays evidences of doubt and unbelief in the power of the word. Advice on how to regulate human conduct and human affairs is freely given, plans and blueprints for a better world-order are skilfully delineated, and echoes of the world's pessimism are commonly heard. Does not this suggest that there is a haunting fear the word of the Lord may not accomplish its intended purpose unless the preacher supports it with his penetrating analysis of what is wrong.

Although St. Paul declared that "it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe," nevertheless too often our words degenerate into foolish preaching with endless exhortations to be good and to do good, and with possibly an over-simplified panacea for a new heaven and a new earth thrown in for good measure. There is a time and a place for exhortation, also for projecting plans and programs; but let us not make the mistake of assuming that it lies within man's power to change the bad into the good, or the better into the best. The power of regeneration and transformation resides within the divine word, as Jesus so clearly indicated in all the parables that deal with seed and growth.

Testimony of History

History confirms this beyond the shadow of doubt. Consider, for instance, the uniqueness of ancient Israel and its impact upon Western civilization. This is no mere human achievement. This is inexplicable apart from the fact that the word of the Lord, fearlessly proclaimed by prophets, was living and active, becoming incorporated, at least in part, in the laws and customs of the nation.

Next, follow the march of Christianity from its early inconspicuous beginnings in Palestine to the present time when its flag has been unfurled in virtually every country of the world. Let the cynics say what they will about the fact that millions within the church are merely camp followers, the fact remains that there is this fellowship of believers called the church, which in spite of persecution, fire and sword, has kept its continuity unbroken, its faith unshaken, and its vision undimmed. Can you account for this in any other way than that the word of the Lord has been active in this fellowship, working miracles of grace and redemption in every age and generation?

Add to this the record of twice-born men—wastrels and wanton sinners of every conceivable type reclaimed for a life of decency; robbers and thieves made honest; the proud becoming humble and the complacent, stirred by a divine discontent, pressing forward to the high calling of God in Christ Jesus—and you have another chapter of unsurpassing romance.

And what about those of us who have never known ourselves to stand outside the fellowship of believers? Are we among the elect solely be-

cause of some noble impulse of the heart, some high resolve of the will, or perchance because of the precept and example of devout parents and inspiring teachers? Hardly! Though a number of factors may need to be taken into consideration to account for our membership in the church, none of these mentioned, either singly or collectively, would have kept us firm in the faith apart from the living, active word at work within us.

Away, then, with all haunting doubts concerning the power and the efficacy of the word! Anyone who has eyes to see can discern evidences of this penetrating transforming word both within himself and all around him in the world of human affairs.

Judgment and Grace

Perhaps the author of Hebrews intended to say no more than what has been said. However, this figure of a two-edged sword calls our attention to a facet of biblical religion that ought not to be overlooked. It is this: the word of the Lord cuts two ways. It is both a word of *judgment* and a word of *grace*. The gospel we proclaim is never solely good news; neither is it ever entirely bad news. It is both good news and bad. The good news that God's love is so great that he gave his only Son for our salvation has as its counterpart the bad news that we cannot save ourselves by our own good deeds. And that is bad news. It means that we are not nearly as good as we think we are. On the other hand the bad news that no one can storm the gates of heaven by the quantity and quality of his good works has as its corollary the good news that God's grace is sufficient for every need.

Consider, too, how the divine word confronts us with the impossible demand to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. Just when it dawns on us that it is impossible for us to be perfect, and we are ready to throw up our hands in despair, the assurance comes to us: "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Thus judgment and mercy, challenge and comfort, man's insufficiency and God's sufficiency stand side by side.

The Word Cuts Deep

The divine word also cuts two ways in the sense that it subjects all of life, all human actions and activities, with absolute impartiality, to the righteousness of the kingdom. It does not condone one kind of evil, such as the sins of the spirit, while it condemns another kind of evil, such as the sins of the flesh. Evil is evil, whether it be the sloth of the one-talent man who does not use what he has, the irresponsibility of the five foolish virgins who do not look beyond the immediate moment, or the exploitation of widows and orphans by those in the seat of authority. Jesus found the moral complacency of the worldly-minded Sadducees as reprehensible as the spiritual pride of the respectable Pharisees.

This would suggest that the pulpit must be fair as well as fearless. It has no more right to

give unqualified approval to all policies and practices of labor than what it is justified to condemn everything that carries the label of the National Association of Manufacturers. The church's responsibility is to evaluate critically and conscientiously every party, every program, every institution and organization, its own life and work included.

Responsibility of the Pulpit

The organization known as Christian Action has made this its avowed purpose. According to its constitution it proposes to furnish Protestantism with "a solidly oriented middle ground" to offset the influence of both leftists and rightists, whether in church or society. Strangely enough, however, at the very very first meeting of this organization one detected a tendency to deal more gently with those on the left than those on the right. To be quite specific, a word of warning was raised against the "recrudescence of a type of conservatism which professes to fear immoral political power but is indifferent to irresponsible economic power." These words seem to say that if one must choose it is better to make common cause

with immoral political power than with irresponsible economic power. But should not the church be as critical of immoral political power as of irresponsible economic power? When Amos lifted his voice in the name of the Lord was he not as forthright in denouncing the sins of Israel as those of Syria, Moab and other nations?

Obviously it is never easy to wield this two-edged sword. For one thing, the issues of life are usually quite complex, making it difficult to determine where truth ends and falsehood begins; then too, those who would speak in the name of the Lord are more or less involved in the situation to which they speak, and therefore they are never as objective as they consider themselves to be. All this makes it not only a difficult but also a frightening responsibility. Well may we ask: Who is equal to this task? Is the word we speak a two-edged sword, or does it perhaps have only one cutting edge—one that suits our convenience?

Though we can never be sure that the word we speak is a two-edged sword, we may well hope that it will be such. And to the extent that it is a two-edged sword, we are assured that it will accomplish its intended purpose.

'Thank You'

A Children's Sermon by Stanley Barratt

Longridge, Lancashire, England

THERE is a phrase which is not used as often as it ought to be—just two little words, "thank you." We can say it in many different ways, and every language has its own special phrase for "thank you." Do you ever stop to think just how important these words are?

A newspaper published a letter that had been received by an old lady. She lived alone, had few friends and did not get much mail, but one day to her surprise a letter arrived written in a very neat hand. It was from a boy of sixteen, crippled by infantile paralysis, who lived near by. This is what he wrote: "Thank you for the beautiful flowers which you have had in your garden this summer. The sight of them has cheered me very much."

What a lovely gesture of gratitude! Not only did the boy find pleasure in watching a pretty garden, tended by the old lady, but more important, he remembered to say "thank you" for the blessing he had received. How many of us would do that?

One night three little sisters knelt by their beds and prayed that their mongrel dog Jock, who was missing, would come back home safe. The following day Jock returned in the arms of a policeman who had rescued him from drowning in a canal. The sisters cried for joy. Then one of the little girls said: "Mummy we have lots of toys. Couldn't we sell some of them for the doggies' home to show we are glad that Jock is back?"

Their mother agreed, so the sisters went to

their toy cupboard and got two teddy bears, a woolly dog, four dolls, a doll's pram, a toy piano, a toy sewing machine and some story books which they put on a table in the street. They sold all their toys in half an hour and raised over two pounds which they sent to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which cares for stray and sick animals. The sisters said "thank you" for the safe return of their dog.

In his Gospel, St. Luke records the healing of ten lepers by Jesus as "he was passing between Samaria and Galilee." Nine of the lepers were so overjoyed by the cure that they hurried to tell the good news to their friends, but forgot to thank their Healer. Only one of the ten returned to Jesus to say "thank you," and St. Luke tells us that he was a stranger.

There are some people who forget to say "thank you" even though they have received a blessing. There are others who never want to say "thank you." Many people take for granted the joyous benefits which God so graciously provides. What a wonderful difference saying "thank you" makes! The blessings of this world are many and come to us in different ways. Do not accept them as a matter of right. We should glorify God and remember to say "thank you" every day for his love and care, like St. Paul, "Always and for everything giving thanks . . . to God."

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
For his steadfast love endures for ever.



Advent Admonitions

By Harrison Davis

Isaiah 40:1-3.

I SUPPOSE it is in Handel's oratorio, *The Messiah*, that most people strike up an acquaintance with the "Comfort ye" passage in Isaiah. When the tenor soloist reaches for the high and tender notes of the famous recitative, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people," every man whose heart is not of stone, and who is able to hear without a hearing aid, straightens a bit in his pew. A strange peace settles over him, and he whispers inwardly, "This is for me!"

It was so in the day of Isaiah. The Hebrew people had had their nation's pride and glory ground to ashes and dust in the destruction of Sennacherib. Lord Byron told of their frightening fate at the hands of the Assyrians in some of the most melodious lines in English poetry:

The Assyrians came down like the wolf on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on deep Galilee.

There was steel also in Sennacherib's spears and he had herded the Hebrews off to Babylon as hapless victims of conquest. His slave-drivers had whipped them to work, as the Egyptians had done in the time of Moses. His goons had strong-armed them into servile occupations, had yanked them out of prisoner-of-war camps, had sported with them like well-fed terriers play with mice, commanding them to sing the songs of their ancestral faith. ("How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land!")

Release from Captivity

Then a new king, Cyrus the Persian, had miraculously risen to seize control of the conquistadores, the Assyrians, and straightway made assurances to the Hebrews that he would release them from captivity, indeed would help them return to their native Jerusalem. In that hour of numbness and suspense when the news came, a moment when every man's heart alternated between unbelief and incredulous joy, Isaiah the prophet had stood in their midst to speak for God:

Comfort, comfort my people,
says our God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that her warfare is ended,
that her iniquity is pardoned, . . .

As each man heard, with tears streaming down his cheeks, he said to himself, "This is for me!"

When our Christian forefathers centuries later

made a beachhead on the Roman continent, they seized hold of this "Comfort ye" passage from Isaiah, and other similar passages from chapters 40 to 66, and said to themselves, "This is for us!" These Hebrew Scriptures from the exile, with their hope and restoration, became Scriptures of anticipation for them. Did they not sing of the Messiah? Well, the Messiah had come in Jesus of Nazareth. So tenor soloists sing the "Comfort ye" passage to Christian congregations the world over this Advent season and as we listen, we hear ourselves saying with them, "This is for us!"

In Need of God's Comfort

This is for us at Christmas time because Christ in his coming brings us the comfort of God. Certainly a large part of the world's population needs that comfort. If it could voice its real feeling in a single song, it might choose the spiritual, "Sometimes I feel like a motherless child, a long way from home." It's one thing for some of us to live in foam-rubber security, oblivious to the pain and suffering that nine-tenths of the human race knows too well, but then how long can we be sure we can be counted in the fortunate one-tenth? Who knows when the foam rubber may give out! This thought alone may drive us to see that there are many besides ourselves who need God's comfort.

I walk into my favorite Chinese laundry once a week with an armful of soiled shirts. The Chinese wife looks up at me over her steaming iron and a shy smile dawns on her sweet face. A welcoming grin wreathes itself momentarily on the stoical countenance of her husband. As I clutch my ticket and turn to leave, they sing-song a "goodby" at me. Everything is friendly, cheerful. Yet I find myself remembering Lafcadio Hearn when I think of them. Hearn, you recall, was impressed with the cheerfulness of his Oriental cook until one day he stole a look through the pantry window. The cook was hunched over the table, his shoulders shaking in some private sorrow. How true of life! Look into the lives of most people around you and you will find them needing God's comfort. "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak

HARRISON DAVIS, like his congregation, takes pride in the fact that his church—the First Methodist of New Rochelle, New York—is the second oldest Methodist church in America, having been organized in 1771 by Francis Asbury. He held previous pastorates in Vermont and New York City.

tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended . . ."

This "warfare" that the prophet speaks of: Is it ever done? We fight daily to keep our heads above water. It's not simply inflation and taxes, or Susie's new boy friend. It's not only recurrently bad news on the international scene or the verdict from the operating room or unpaid bills. It's not alone disillusionment in love or breakdowns in friendship. It's not failure in health or low grades in examinations. It's all these things taken together that make life a warfare. It's their never-ending succession—one on top of another, torrents of trials, downpours of tribulations. "It never rains but it pours," we say as we shrug shoulders in concert. Listen again to Isaiah: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. . . ." This is for us!

The Good Shepherd

This is for us, *not* because God will take us out of the warfare of life, but because he offers us in faith the means to withstand it. The Christian walks through the valley of the shadow of death, as does anybody else, but he walks it not alone. The Lord is his shepherd. God's rod and his staff, they comfort him.

In my first church in the hills of Vermont, I used to watch one of my laymen cross the village green on his way home from work. He had spent a long day in the slate quarries. In good weather and in bad he had worked in the brittle shale with sharp cutting tools, with an eye always cocked for a dynamite blast or a rock slide. Now he was headed home, weary to the bone. For what? For two young daughters who were hopeless idiots. The neighbors spoke to him many times about those daughters, advising him to institutionalize them. Gently but firmly he put them aside. He and his wife would care for them themselves, thank you. How patient they were. How prettily-dressed were their girls—always a bright ribbon in their hair and freshly-ironed cotton dresses. Their childish gibberish would send you away in tears, but not so the father or mother. One or the other was in church every Sunday, their faces thin and weary, their shoulders bowed, their shy smiles sweet and steady, the reflection of a spirit which had laid hold of the comfort of God.

Speak comfortably to us, O Lord, where we need thy comfort. Show us the faith that tells us how to overcome in the warfare of our life. Amen.

Divine Pardon

As it is with the warfare, so it is with the iniquity. "Cry to her . . . that her iniquity is pardoned." How many of us bog down spiritually because of the evil which is around us, coiling its octopus-arms around our "tight little islands" of innocence and idealism, sinking us beneath the wave. "Breathes there a man with soul so dead" who in some similar circumstance has not had, or should not have had, to hang his head in shame and confess his own sin? How can we say there is evil

in the world without seeing our own participation in it? More than that—our own contribution to it!

The Book of Common Prayer before the revision of 1928 had a prayer of general confession which all Protestant churches use on occasion. "Almighty and most merciful Father," it reads, "we have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us. But thou, O Lord, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners. . . ." I used to have a chap in one of my congregations who bucked against the use of that damning phrase "miserable sinners." New as I was to the ministry, I tended to side with him. But the more one inquires into life, the more need one sees for the divine pardoning of iniquities. Suppose a man knew that he could *never* be forgiven!

One of the most pitiable sights in the modern world is the public confessions of guilt in the court trials in the communist-dominated countries. Here's this man Vladimir Clementis, a few years ago representing his native Czechoslovakia in the United Nations, now hanged as a traitor to that country for some slight deviation from the party line. Ask him what it was which he did which he ought not to have done and he would confess readily enough, in a wooden drivel, to deviations from "the people's truth." He looks at "the people's truth" and sees no pity in it. It is a truth of sorts without a rag of justice or mercy in it for him, an implacable harshness without a trace of hope. So he mouths his guilt without the slightest chance of a pardon.

Two Advent Voices

One of the real fears of today is that this gloomy gospel of pardonless guilt will take over the joyous gospel of Christian forgiveness. This is one of the battlefields in the warfare between Christianity and communism. Christ will prevail over communism only as each Christian in his heart brings his life in review before divine judgment and seeks the assured pardon of the Most High. Surely the most joyous tidings in all the world are "Comfort, comfort my people," when its "iniquity is pardoned."

Enough has been said on this Advent theme of the prophet Isaiah to indicate that there are two strands in it. In the first, we see God bent on rescue. He comes in the person of his son with comfort to the hard-pressed and to those who are weary of warfare. He comes with pardon and forgiveness to erring man. He is the Father striding down the highway, arms outstretched to the Prodigal Son who staggers in from the far country still fouled with "the pods that the swine ate." God bent on rescue: this is the first voice of Advent, a message of joy.

But there is a second voice of Advent, a message of warning: "Prepare the way of the Lord," it says. "Make straight in the desert a highway for

our God." It is a call to an ethical life, a summons to humility, a tocsin for the straightening of the crooked places in a man's soul. Advent is not only joy, it is also admonition. It tells us that the Child Jesus will be "the cause of the downfall" as well as the "rise of many a one in Israel" (Moffatt). He comes to judge as well as to bless! Mary E. Coleridge wrote:

I saw a stable low and very bare;
A little child in a manger—
The safety of the world was lying there—
And also the world's danger.

The truth is that the God who rescues is also the God who requires. We can not have his comfort without accepting his claim on us. We can not receive his rescue without at the same time being willing to fulfill his requirements. The Cockney soldier in Studdert-Kennedy's poem "The Sorrows of God" had learned the hard way that the Christ who could be gentle could also be grim. As he confronted Christ, his hand outstretched for comfort, he could not dodge his claim in the one word "Well?"

All eyes was in 'Is eyes,
My wife's and a million more;
And once I thought as those two eyes
Were the eyes of the London whore.

There ain't no throne, and there ain't no book:
It's 'Im you've got to see,
It's 'Im, just 'Im that is the judge
O' blokes like you and me.

And boys, I'd sooner frizzle up
P' the fires of a burning 'Ell,
Than stand and look into 'Is face,
And 'ear 'Im say—"Well?"

From the moral standpoint, Advent and Christmas are easy marks if we embrace them only for their comfort. It is easy to accept the security which God affords, his sheltering of us in the warfare of life. Having that, we may want then to be let alone. But the word of God will not let us alone. No sooner does it offer us comfort than it bids us put our house in order. On the one hand, "Comfort, comfort my people"—yes. But on the other hand, "Prepare the way of the Lord."

Paul Sherer tells the story of the college professor who sat reading a book in the waiting room of the maternity hospital while his own child was being born. When the nurse came in and told him it was a boy, he scarcely bothered to look up. He just said what he always said when somebody at the college rapped on his door and made some remark about a boy: "Ask him what he wants!"

The Christ Child stands at the threshold of the door leading to the heart of our world, to your heart and to mine. Shall we pretend to be busy in our upholstered indifference, turning his arrival over to the maid with a mechanical, "Ask him what he wants?" Or isn't it about time we dropped from foam-rubber cushions to our knees on the hard floor of humility and in prayer implored that he enter the room of our hearts not only with his comfort but also with his cleansing power? Isn't it about time?

A Pastoral Prayer

By Merl Schiffman

*Bethel Evangelical and Reformed,
Elmhurst, Illinois*

ALmighty God, who dost govern the changes in the times and seasons of men, open our eyes once more to the everlastingness of thy purpose and the variety of thy endless bounty. Remind us of the temporariness of our days and sober us with the certainty of our needs. Yet fail us not in the recollection of the completeness of thy love and the endless capacities of the spirit which thou hast bequeathed to each one of us.

As we recall thy greatness and our smallness, enable us, O God, to employ those spiritual graces available to us for the refreshment of our souls. Make clear to our eyes those faults of our living which we too well enjoy, and raise in us a desire for penitence. Help us to deplore our evil ways that we may be truly eager for the removal of our pride, our indifference and our unconcern.

Yet as we confess our failure before thee, lift us up by the forgiving mercy that we may be revived and refreshed, and that all our living may be channeled into creative effort for thy Kingdom.

To this end accept our gratitude, our Father, for the reward of gifts which we cannot possibly have earned. For our homes and our children, for the understanding of our friends, the silent aid of those who through community and national means protect and improve our living, for the results of the toil of nameless folk whose labors provide us with the needs and pleasures of life, we thank thee.

Make prominent in our concern thy church and all who serve in her behalf: our fathers who have provided this place of worship, whose foresight has brought us into the fold of Christian workers everywhere; the men and women and youth whose interest and prayers flow through thy church in varied expressions of stewardship. Move us with generosity to support thy church through gifts of love because of the love Christ has for us.

God of compassion, minister to thy children according to their deep and personal needs. Be thou the companion of those who sorrow, a support to those wearied by life's vexations, a protector to all who seek thy help when temptation beckons. Give guidance and a goal to those who are capable and strong. Undergird us all with the certainty of thy presence, that we fail not ourselves, each other, nor thee.

In the Spirit of Christ we pray. Amen.

Bad Bargain

YOU traded fellowship with God,
The vision of his face,
For a white lie today.
To spare yourself the small, hard pain
Of truth, betrayed his grace,
Your birthright threw away!

ELIZABETH PATTON MOSS.



Apologia for My Life

By S. M. Shoemaker

I STAY near the door.
I neither go too far in, nor stay too far out.
The door is the most important door in the world—
It is the door through which men walk when they
find God.
There's no use my going 'way inside, and staying
there,
When so many are still outside, and they, as much
as I,
Crave to know where the door is.
And all that so many men ever find
Is only the wall where a door ought to be.
They creep along the wall like blind men,
With outstretched, groping hands,
Feeling for a door, knowing there must be a door,
Yet they never find it . . .
So I stay near the door.

The most tremendous thing in the world
Is for men to find that door—the door to God.
The most important thing any man can do
Is to take hold of one of those blind, groping hands,
And put it on the latch—the latch that only clicks
And opens to the man's own touch.
Men die outside that door, as starving beggars die
On cold nights in cruel cities in the dead of
winter—
Die for want of what is within their grasp.
They live, on the other side of it—live because they
have found it.
Nothing else matters compared to helping them
find it,
And open it, and walk in, and find Him . . .
So I stay near the door.

Go in, great saints, go all the way in—
Go 'way down into the cavernous cellars,
And 'way up into the spacious attics.
It is a vast, roomy house, this house where God is.
Go into the deepest of hidden casements,
Of withdrawal, of silence, of sainthood.
Some must inhabit those inner rooms,
And know the depths and heights of God,

S. M. SHOEMAKER became rector of Calvary Episcopal Church, Pittsburgh, in 1952, after more than a quarter century in New York City as rector of Calvary Protestant Episcopal Church. A graduate of Princeton University and Union Theological Seminary, Dr. Shoemaker is an editorial associate of The Pulpit and author of several books, latest of which are The Church Alive and They're on the Way.

And call outside to the rest of us how wonderful
it is.

Sometimes I take a deeper look in,
Sometimes venture in a little farther;
But my place seems closer to the opening . . .
So I stay near the door.

There is another reason why I stay there.
Some people get part way in and become afraid
Lest God and the zeal of his house devour them;
For God is so very great, and asks all of us.
And these people feel a cosmic claustrophobia,
And want to get out. "Let me out!" they cry.
And the people 'way inside only terrify them more.
Somebody must be by the door to tell them they
are spoiled

For the old life, they have seen too much.
Once taste God, and nothing but God will do any
more.

Somebody must be watching for the frightened
Who seek to sneak out just where they came in,
To tell them how much better it is inside.
The people too far in do not see how near these are
To leaving—preoccupied with the wonder of it all.
Somebody must watch for those who have entered
the door,

But would like to run away. So for them, too,
I stay near the door.

I admire the people who go 'way in.
But I wish they would not forget how it was
Before they got in. Then they would be able to
assist

The people who have not yet even found the door,
Or the people who want to run away again from
God.

You can go in too deeply, and stay in too long,
And forget the people outside the door.
As for me, I shall take my old accustomed place,
Near enough to God to hear him, and know he is
there,

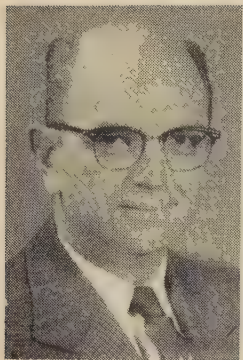
But not so far from men as not to hear them,
And remember they are there, too. Where? Out-
side the door—

Thousands of them, millions of them.

But—more important for me—

One of them, two of them, ten of them,
Whose hands I am intended to put on the latch.
So I shall stay by the door and wait
For those who seek it.

"I had rather be a doorkeeper . . ."
So I stay near the door.



*A Sermon for St. Stephen's
Day, December 26*

Christmas and Martyrdom

By John Schmidt

Acts 6:8—7:2; 7:51-60.

IT seems almost as if the ancient church foresaw our American temptation to sentimentalize Christmas. Of course that is not the actual reason why the festival of our Lord's birth is surrounded by martyr days. The reason is rather to be found in the sober realization of the New Testament that "he came to his own home and his own people received him not." That tragedy of rejection is reflected in the blood-colored paraments in our chancel today, as well as by the fact that about this festival of joy the church has placed the days of commemoration for ancient martyrs. A halo of martyrdom surrounds Christmas. For alongside the day of St. Stephen there are the days of the Holy Innocents and of St. John the apostle and evangelist.

There was profound wisdom manifested in these selections. The helpless babies of Bethlehem, who died because a cruel king preferred that innocent babes should die rather than that his throne be threatened from even the most unlikely source, were martyrs in deed, even though not in intention. On the other hand, John was the only disciple to die a natural death, even though, like his companions, he was prepared also to give this final testimony to his faith. He was a martyr in intention, though not in deed. Stephen, of course, was a martyr in both intention and deed.

Obligation of Discipleship

We read his story in Acts 6 and 7. In time and mood they are far removed from the Nativity story. Yet as the church saw, they belong together.

Stephen speaks to us, first of all, concerning the obligation of true discipleship. Celebrating Christmas is much more than revelling in sentimental "adoration" of the Babe. It is so easy to permit the great fact of God's supreme gift to mankind to degenerate into the kind of mushiness that is seen, for example, in the woman who protested that she could not find any carols she could

use at her Christmas party—"They are all so distressfully theological!" Yet it may be that even she is nearer to the Kingdom than those who wallow in an emotional ocean and do not even hear the good news of redemption that the angels proclaimed and that our carols joyfully repeat.

Certainly Stephen rejoiced at the news that God so loved the world that he has given this Christmas Gift to men, but he knew that emotion is nothing if it is separated from life's totality. There was nothing particularly joyous about the situation that he faced because he had welcomed the Babe of Bethlehem into his life. He was on trial, but his case was as rigged as any prisoner's standing before a totalitarian court in our day. His judges had already determined upon his death. That was why he had been arrested. The formal trial was intended only to throw a mantle of legality over a lynching.

If you read Stephen's long address to the court, you may find it a bit dull and hard to finish. But not if you keep in mind the fact that, though this man was on trial for his life, instead of arguing his own innocence, he dared to accuse his judges of murder! That is both exciting for us and dangerous for him. But that is exactly what Stephen did. "As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it." It is not surprising that his judges were enraged and ground their teeth against him.

Inner Compulsion

Witnesses to the truth of God have often had that experience. Ezekiel, for example, was warned that he was sent to a nation of rebels, impudent and stubborn. Nevertheless he was to proclaim God's Word, that "whether they hear or refuse to hear . . . they will know that there has been a prophet among them." A modern preacher, standing in this magnificent line of apostolic succession, was once accused of "rubbing his hearers the wrong way." But his quick reply was, "I'm rubbing them the right way; they ought to turn around." That fits Stephen's thought precisely.

He knew, from the first, that every believer must be a witness. No man commissioned Stephen to preach, remember. He was selected as one of

JOHN SCHMIDT, pastor of Indianola Evangelical Lutheran Church, Columbus, Ohio, for two years directed the service to refugees of the Lutheran World Federation in Germany, and then for a year was responsible for the total operation in Geneva. He attended the Amsterdam Assembly, was a staff member of the Lutheran World Federation Assembly in Hannover and a delegate of the United Lutheran Church to the Faith and Order Conference in Lund. He has written several books and translated sermon volumes by others for publication in Germany.

"seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom," to administer the charity distributed by the Jerusalem church—so that the twelve might preach! But he knew that this service did not exhaust his obligation as a follower of the Lord Jesus. So frequently and effectively did he speak to the Jews in their synagogues concerning Jesus the Messiah that they complained, "This man never ceases to speak," and determined to silence him. They knew that nothing short of death could accomplish this. For like the shepherds of Bethlehem who "made known the saying which had been told them concerning this child," Stephen was driven by an inner compulsion that was far stronger than any earthly appointment could be.

The fact that he was a "layman" had nothing to do with this fact. Important only was his status as a Christian. He would have understood the words of Sook Pong Snoi of Thailand, who told the International Missionary Conference at Willengen, Germany, in 1952, "Why all this theological talk about missions and witnessing? It is simple. You witness because you must. A new baby is born—it cries; a man is reborn in Christ—he witnesses. The more the baby cries, the more you know it is a good healthy baby. The Christian is just like that."

Meeting Physical Needs

He knew, too, that witnessing with words is hypocrisy if our whole lives do not witness to the same belief. His official assignment to distribute justly the food and clothing needed by the poor members of the Christian community was part of this total witness. "If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,' without giving them the things needed for the body, what doth it profit?" Being a witness to the merciful love of God in his Son required of Stephen that he do what he could to meet also the physical needs of his contemporaries. In our day the obligation is spelled out as "service to refugees," "inter-church aid" and the like, but it is the same obligation still.

Even shocking and cruel death dare not disturb this witness-bearing. As the crushing stones bore his body to the earth, Stephen looked upward with quiet confidence and prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And like the One who lived in him through faith, he added, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." Faith such as Stephen's masters the fear of death, because it gives assurance that the Lordship of Christ is not limited to this temporal fraction of man's life. In our present hysteria at the possibility of mass death through the hydrogen and cobalt bombs, we who believe in Stephen's Lord have a magnificent opportunity to bear witness through the calmness and steadiness of our lives.

We have an equally relevant word to say to a divided world, a world of commingled hatred and fear. Coexistence between East and West is being violently rejected by many. But what other possibility is there except the annihilation of one by

the other? That would be totalitarian warfare such as the world has never yet seen. And its outcome would be unpredictable. We once destroyed the Kaiser, to get Hitler; Hitler, to get Stalin; Tojo, to get Mao. Does our faith suggest any way out of this tragic situation? Yes, there might be a creative transformation, by which, as an ancient collect has it, "All our enemies may be led to true repentance, and may have the same love, and be of one accord and of one mind and heart, with us and with thy whole Christian church."

Cost of Discipleship

Be careful, however, before you "buy" that solution. For it is not only our enemies who need to be transformed. We also, in the West, need to be brought to true repentance, that the mind of Christ may really be our master. But if this happens and if we then sincerely pray for our enemies, who would dare to limit the possibilities?

But let us be clear about this. We do not bear this witness for the sake of any temporal gains that may come to us. We bear witness, in word and in life, because we must. It is our Christian obligation.

The experience of Stephen should warn us of the cost of discipleship. "His face was like the face of an angel" and his words were like those of his Lord, yet the answer was that "they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him."

This aspect of the gospel seems much more real to us today, even in comfortable America, than it did a few years ago. Then persecution seemed to belong in the pages of curious old books, but now it has become so common that it rarely hits the front pages of our newspapers. From one point of view we may rejoice that this is so. There is no insult so great as to be ignored. That was the fate of the church for many years. It was treated with the disdainful respect one shows a feeble old lady. The church was given a comfortable seat—and then ignored, so far as the realities of life were concerned. Modern totalitarian states at first treated the church in the same way, but then they learned that the old lady was astonishingly alive. Even the church was surprised. Then patronizing gentleness gave way to bitter hatred. That is much healthier and much more complimentary. In Edna St. Vincent Millay's defiant words, "The church is no candle. Blow on!"

Modern Persecutions

Yet one would not dare soft-pedal the tragedy that this brings to thousands. Once again it is expensive to be a Christian. Yet there are many who in other times were careless about their participation and loyalty, who have now discovered that the price is cheap, after all. "A mighty fortress" and "Lord, keep us steadfast in thy Word" has become once again the triumphant proclamation of a faith that does "not tremble at the brink of poverty or woe."

When Pastor Erich Schumann was arrested and

given a prison sentence two years ago, the Lutheran Church of Saxony issued a public statement to its members: "Whereas the sentence states that Pastor Schumann was responsible solely as an individual, we declare that he spoke as a servant of the church on the basis of the Word of God. Thus the sentence touches the whole church and all those who preach the Word of God as their vocation. . . . We call upon the Christian community: Be untiring in intercession for our brother, Pastor Schumann. Be untiring in intercession for all who preach the Gospel. Be untiring in intercession for those in authority." Worthy heirs of Stephen!

We are not members of the church triumphant, but of the church militant, of the church "under a cross." Even in the midst of our Christmas joy we must not be permitted to forget it.

Rewards of Discipleship

Yet who feels sorry for Stephen? Or for any other martyr? Dimly we, who have not tasted persecution, sense that they have found the joyful reward of true discipleship.

I wonder what was the source of that sentence in the biblical account which says that the members of the court (his enemies, remember) "saw that his face was like the face of an angel." It could have come only from within the group itself. Might it not be that this was told to Luke by Paul? For Paul, then Saul the Pharisee, was one of those who sat in judgment and who actively concurred in the sentence of death. If so, it would help us a bit to understand what went on in the persecutor's mind.

We do know that the memory of this judicial lynching stayed with Paul through the years, as a fire in his bones: "I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." Was the memory of this expression on the face of a dying man and of the forgiving words that answered the cruel stones at least a part of that "goad" against which Saul had been kicking; We do know, certainly, that the torch of flaming witness that dropped from the lifeless hand of Stephen was picked up after a time and carried to the very borders of the Roman world by "a young man named Saul . . . [who] was consenting to his death."

The Mighty Lord

We may not forget that the Babe who lies so softly in the tender care of his mother is not helpless. Rather it is he of whom the prophet wrote: "The government will be upon his shoulder, and his name will be called 'Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.' Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end." How much of the tragedy of our observance of his birthday arises from our forgetfulness of this fact. He is the mighty Lord. The kingdom and the power and the glory are his, now and through eternity.

Neither he nor his church are helpless before their enemies. In fact, the witness of the martyrs

has been that only in the moment of persecution does the power of Jesus become unmistakably clear. So Bishop Ordass of the Hungarian Lutheran Church could tell the Communist judge before whom he stood awaiting sentence that never had he felt the joy and power of the gospel to be as real as in the long months he had spent in a prison cell. Samuel Rutherford, imprisoned for the gospel in Aberdeen, wrote a letter in which he gave his address as "The Palace of Jesus Christ" and said, "My Master doth give me great joy—good measure, pressed down, and running over." And John Bunyan, telling how he was taken from the courtroom to his cell on Bedford Bridge, wrote, "I did sing as though joy did make me sing."

One of the church fathers could say of his opponents in a period of fierce persecution, "Every man who witnesses this great endurance is struck with some misgivings. He is set on fire to look into it to find its cause. When he has learned the truth, at once he follows it himself." So many of our churches have lost that note from our life and preaching. We have sought to appeal to man's comfort and then wonder why the world passes by without interest. We try to compete with the entertainment facilities of the world, and come out second best. As Stanley Jones once put it, "They have swept out of the Protestant churches the crucifixes and put in cushions. Then they wonder why the cushions are not used." How strange that the church should be strongest when it is weak! But is not that the central paradox of Christmas—a helpless Baby who is wholly dependent upon the loving care of his parents, but who is at the same time the King of kings and the Lord of lords?

Christmas and Life's Dark Moments

How fortunate it is for us that the church will not let us approach our Lord's manger without lingering briefly at the tomb of martyrs. Otherwise we might think that Christmas had no meaning for the dark, tragic moments of life. We might conclude as did a friend of mine: "My wife died just before Christmas leaving four little children. Since then the day hasn't meant much to me." But Christmas is much more than tinsel, toys and family gatherings. Christ was born into a brutal world ruled by a dictator. Soon after his birth little children were slaughtered in cold blood to guard against a possible pretender to the throne. And his coming meant that many others like Stephen would have to give up their lives for their faith.

Christmas celebrates the birth of the "strong Son of God, immortal love," who will not be defeated. Therefore we can sing,

And ye, beneath life's crushing load,
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way
With painful steps and slow;
Look now! for glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road
And hear the angels sing!

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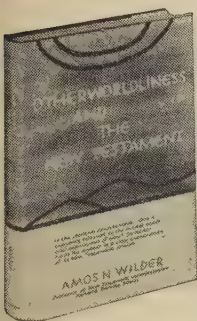
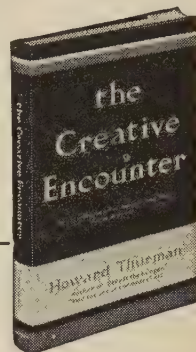


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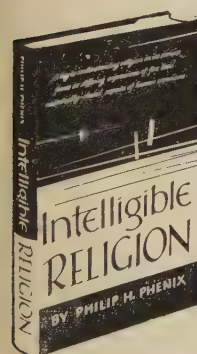
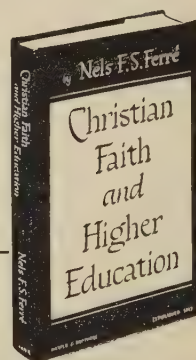


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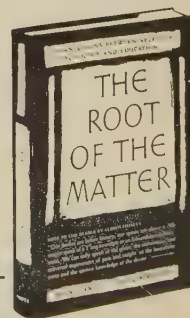


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By Javan R. Corl

Celina, Ohio, Circuit, Evangelical United Brethren

THE star has always played an attractive part in the Christmas celebration. Aside from the nativity scene itself, no other part of our present-day Christmas decorations has so biblical a setting as the star. For Christian worshippers, it can have at least three meanings:

The star stands as a guide to Christ. It was the star that guided the wise men to Christ. Students of the heavens, as they undoubtedly were, they felt the divine pull of this astronomical aberrancy. How they knew that it symbolized the birth of the King of the Jews, we are not told. But they appeared in Jerusalem convinced of that fact. Departing from Jerusalem, they followed the star to Christ.

The star is a symbol of the trustworthiness of God. The wise men had traveled long and far. They must have been weary when at last they reached Bethlehem. Can't you imagine at least one of their number wanting to turn back when they were sidetracked in Jerusalem? But they followed onward, and when at last they found the Christ whom they had been seeking, they realized that the star had not deceived them.

The star is a symbol of the completeness of life. Hovering over the abode of Christ, the star meant that the long journey had been completed. At last the travelers had arrived. The whole purpose of their mission had been accomplished, once the star had led them to Christ. Likewise complete is the goal of life's journey when we end at the feet of Christ.

What Do You Want for Christmas?

By Henry Pope Mobley

*Oakland Avenue Presbyterian,
Rock Hill, S. C.*

WHAT do you want for Christmas? Something special, I dare say. Let me tell you what I want and this may be what you want, too.

First, I want *someone to need me*, as a dog needs a master or a child needs a parent. All humans share that want—to mean something to somebody. What more crushing fate can befall the human heart than to feel unneeded, unwanted.

Kiss me on the cheek, dear wife, and tell me I am more than a pay check or an answer to the grocery bill, that you need me and love me. I can do without the new striped tie or smoking jacket.

Touch me gently, husband, and let me read it in your eyes, that I am more than a hot meal at six o'clock or a neatly ironed shirt in the morning.

Let me know you need me and you love me. That means more than a watch under the Christmas tree or a gift certificate at my favorite store.

There are men who work for or with you by whom a word of appreciation for their loyalty, or an expression of your dependence upon them by personal letter or personal shake of the hand, would be more cherished than some impersonal gift, no matter how handsome.

Love's Expression

Second, I want *someone I can love*. Perhaps our desire to have someone love us comes first; still love seems incomplete unless we give as well as receive.

Little children help make Christmas for that reason. For we can love them. We can give the presents, the frankincense and myrrh that represent our affection, expecting nothing in return except the light of surprise and pleasure in their eyes. At Christmas time, more than on other occasions, the need to express our love swells up and overflows in our giving of things.

In a study group someone asked why we were created. "To glorify God and enjoy him forever," our catechism says. Would it be blasphemy to give another reason—that we were created in the image of God because he, who is love, needed an object for his affection?

Third, I want the *strength and faith* to meet with courage whatever trials and sorrows and disappointments come in life. When we see the trouble that is around us on every side, we cannot ask conscientiously for release from ours, but we can pray—and expect an answer to our prayers—for the strength that will enable us to bear our trials with faith and not be borne under by them.

When I use the word trouble, do not misunderstand me to mean only the sorrow and expense of sickness or death, devastating as they may be. I mean also the difficulties we face in making a living for our family, our trials as mother or housewife, the pressure that society puts on us. And for you young men and women of school age, I mean the troubles you face as part of your education for life. Forgive us who have in the passage of time forgotten how great your trials sometimes are, who may call trifling your disappointments and heartbreaks in love affairs, your disagreements with your parents, your concern over examinations, or clothes, or dates, or flowers for the dance.

The World's Attractions

If we will ask him and let him, our Christ will give us help in overcoming our own problems and providing comfort and understanding to others. Hence we want the kind of wisdom

The Pulpit

that sends us to our knees when trouble comes.

Fourth, I want to grow closer to my God. Yet uncertainty awaits us here, for if we grow closer to him, he makes demands upon us that we do not like. Suppose he told us to go to a mission field—we might try to run away, like Jonah, when God told him to preach repentance to the people of Ninevah. Or suppose he told us to give up some hatred or habit which we enjoy. Then we might object or rationalize, like the young man who was told to sell his goods and give to the poor. He was willing to be a disciple, but only on his own terms.

Often there comes a terrible struggle in our hearts over this gift of spiritual growth. The world offers us many attractions, and we cannot control ourselves when something attractive comes within our reach. The kleptomaniac apparently can't resist taking pretty items from stores or homes. Others can't resist the pleasure of letting themselves go when romance is in the air, of drinking when everyone else is doing it, of gossiping, or losing their tempers and saying things they later wish could be taken back.

Don't misunderstand me; by becoming a disciple of Christ, by growing spiritually, I don't mean that we cannot enjoy life. Strangely enough, those who have grown spiritually, who have given themselves over to the service of the Master, seem to enjoy life more than anyone else in the world.

There is one other item on the Christmas list, but this is something we can give instead of receive. We want to make a present to the world—a present of a life that means something. We want to be of use and to make the world a little better for having been here. We want to leave a kind of immortality of service when we have finished, to leave a mark of joy where we have stood.

The Holy Night

THE earth and sky!
Darkness—and starlight beam-
ing—
Mysterious blend of power's double-
might;
Love's star stands high
Yet has an infant dreaming
Within a lowly stable during night.

Despair and hope!
Mid crudeness—slow awakening
To glories knocking faintly at soul's
gate;
The knowledge-scope,
Sheltered in seed, wants breaking
To bear the fruit of love—and banish
hate.

As silence pleads,
Voices of deep remembrance
Sing loud of changeless and supernal
light;
Then earth recedes,
And kneels in tender reverence—
Receiving blessings of the Holy Night.
FRANZISKA RAABE PARKINSON.

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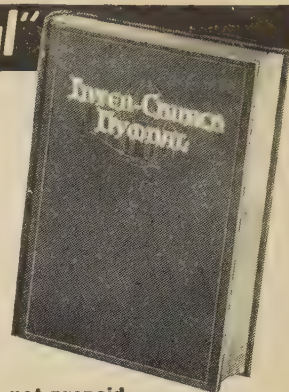
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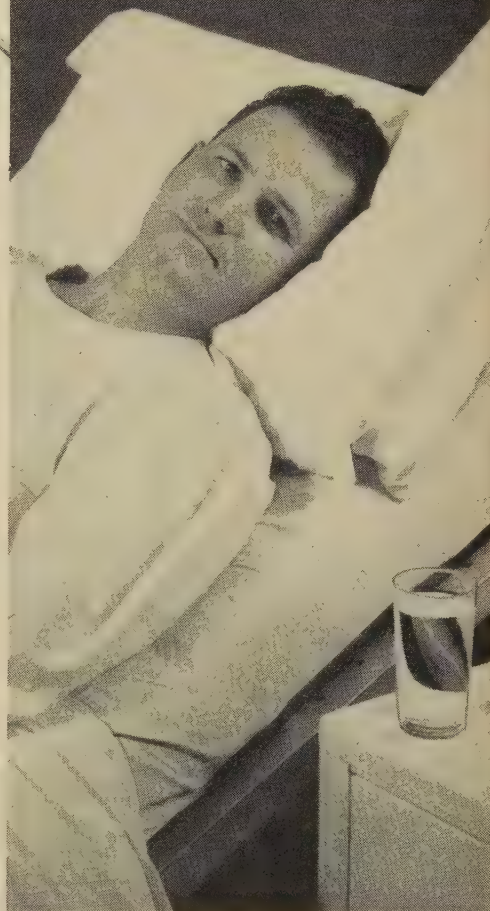
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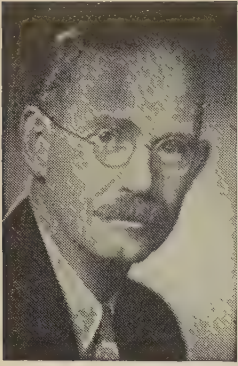
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Pulpit Patter

By Morton S. Enslin

Claims and Credentials

MANY Christian preachers lay a tremendous store on apostolic succession. In some communions, if you don't have it, you're just nobody. To be sure, if you chance to be a student of ecclesiastical history and insist upon looking through your own eyes—and without canonical blinders—you're apt to be painfully aware of a lot of gaps and lacunae; but it is always possible to be a bit nonchalant, light a taper, and overlook—or forget—those unfortunate dropped stitches in the web of mankind's memory.

For others it is a matter of no slightest concern. They are apt to retort, if pushed, that in the New Testament—and that is the source which really counts—the only member of the Twelve who has a recorded successor is Judas Iscariot. James was murdered, but there is no record that his position was filled. In the case of Judas it was different; he and he alone needed a successor. Ergo, all who would claim apostolic succession with any shred of biblical support must be ready to see themselves as successors to Judas Iscariot. The argument would seem to deserve a round and unqualified, logical and

theological, if not ecclesiastical, Q.E.D.

Then there is a third group who find their title to succession clear and somewhat anterior to that of the Apostles. They are successors to John the Baptist. There can be no possible argument here, for they even have his descriptive title: are they not baptizers as well as Baptists? Many of them—it is only fair to say that it usually requires the balmier sun south of the Mason-Dixon line to mellow and mature this confidence—shun as an outrageous, at least as a historically unjustifiable, appellation the term *Protestant*. They are not Protestants but *Baptists*, and thus they can regard both the heirs to Luther *et al* and the poor benighted Romanists (Episcopalians they feel are simply Romanists without a pope) as alike outside the pale of New Testament Christians. Thus, of course, they find no place for themselves in any such folly as the World Council and the—somewhat optimistically and actually incorrectly styled—ecumenical movement.

But while there are thus many preachers who for one reason or another would feel hesitant to lay claim to apostolic succession, there are

mighty few who would not vigorously and, on occasion, vociferously claim a genetic descent from the prophets. Just which of the prophets is not important. That they are prophets is what counts. Do we not style ourselves "sons of the prophets," our theological seminaries "schools of the prophets"?

All this raises a mighty important question, but one that is perilous to ask. I know the lightning that will descend on this second benighted Ajax. But I'll still ask the question: "Is it prophets we want today?" Frankly, I am far from sure. The prophet, whose mantle we preachers so easily gather about us, may not have been a man who could see around corners or predict coming events with a stopwatch precision; his claims were still more stupendous. He was God's spokesman: not a man humbly striving to do God's will, but one supernaturally laid hold upon and made in literal fact God's very mouthpiece. When he spoke, it was not he but God who spoke. Be it a Micaiah or a Paul, that is the pattern and Galatians 1:8-9 its golden text.

Perhaps there are men today who believe themselves so endowed, or is it endowed? I pity them. With thoughts farthest from flippancy I want none of it. "Thy will be done?" Indeed yes, a thousand times yes; but the confidence, which so easily becomes arrogance, that because of a "call," of three years in a seminary, of the imposition of holy hands, I should know the counsels of God—no, that is not for me.

A bit more modesty, a bit more restraint—after all, new occasions do teach new duties—these are qualities it appears to me which are a crying need if we are to grapple with the increasing perplexities and heartaches on every hand. I still remember the stinging but justified criticism by a good churchman of a cleric known to us both: "Every time he speaks he gives the impression of having just come from a luncheon conference with the Almighty."

It's a pitfall hard to escape, brethren. A man can be a faithful and useful minister of Jesus Christ, with a passionate concern to find and do God's will, even if he doesn't have all the answers nor all the "Thus saith the Lord's."

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Contributed by Gordon Domm,
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Types of Givers

By Clarence P. Miller

Trinity Methodist, Delphos, Ohio

ROUGHLY speaking, there are three kinds of givers in the church.

There are those like a *fountain*. Christian leaders need only present the need to these generous folk, and like a fountain they give liberally. Even after they have given they seem to have yet an abundance to give to others.

A second group of people may be likened to a *sponge*. A sponge will absorb water until it becomes saturated, but it will not readily give up any. The only way water can be gotten from a sponge is by squeezing it. Like the sponge, many people will gladly take all God's blessings, but before they will give out of their accumulated store of blessings they must be squeezed by an every-member canvass, a church supper, a bazaar or some other device.

A third group of people may be compared with a child's *piggy bank*. Like the sponge, a piggy bank will accept all that is put into it until it is filled. But unlike the sponge, the piggy bank will surrender nothing, no matter how hard it is squeezed. The only way anything can be taken out of a piggy bank is by smashing it. God must deal with some of us in that manner. When tragedy strikes and our coveted possessions are broken and scattered to the four winds, we belatedly try to gather up some of the damaged fragments to offer to the Lord's service. Yet God's blessing cannot rest upon us as it might have if we in joyful spirit had shared like the overflowing fountain. "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Quest Eternal

By Herbert Beecher Hudnut

Woodward Avenue Presbyterian,
Detroit

RESPLENDENT stood Jerusalem,
And proud her royal story,
But God revealed himself to men
In Bethlehem's starlit glory.

Was it a star the Wise Men saw,
O'er the little town's fair whiteness?
Or was it light within their souls
That shone with such a brightness?

Enough to know they followed on
Until, their search rewarded,
They found the Savior of the world
By humble shepherds guarded.

And we must hold their childlike faith,
Find God in places lowly,
If we, like them, would come to kneel
Before the Christ Child holy.

Title and Text

"Are We on a Sinking Ship?" Acts 27:22—"Take heart; for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship."
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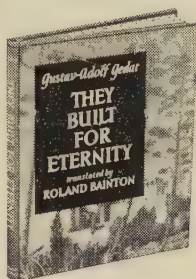
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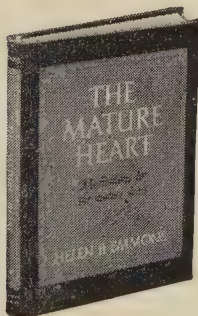


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Ministry of Music

By Ernest K. Emurian

Music Review

ANTICIPATING Christmas, three lovely anthems—all easily adapted for junior choirs—are worthy of special mention. They are "Carol of the Questioning Child," by Kountz (G. Schirmer, New York, No. 9893, SATB, 20 cents); "Hasten Swiftly, Hasten Softly," also by Kountz (Galaxy Music Corporation, New York, No. 1952, SATB with junior choir, 20 cents); "The Sleep of the Holy Child," by Anderson (C. C. Birchard, Boston, No. 2049, SATB with junior choir, 16 cents).

H. W. Gray Co., New York, has an easy choral setting by David Williams entitled "We Thank Thee, O Father" (No. 2345, 18 cents), based on the Thanksgiving hymn "We Plow the Fields and Scatter." It moves along like a hymn tune and is well within the range of the average choir. Another Williams arrangement in the same style is "Lo He Comes, with Clouds Descending" (Gray, No. 2350, 18 cents), likewise easy enough for the humblest choir. A bit more difficult is Walton's delicate musical setting for "His Star," a Christmas anthem for mixed voices (Gray, No. 2348, 18 cents).

For above-average choral groups Williams has a more ambitious composition, "Puer Natus," a 28-page Christmas pastoral for mixed voices (75 cents). Of special interest to the church for which it is intended is Gray's 46-page "Anglican Ways," a manual on liturgical music for Episcopalian choirmasters, by Titcomb (\$2.00).

Shawnee Press, Delaware Water Gap, Pa. (Fred Waring's publishing house), has published a choral setting for the Lord's Prayer based on Handel's "Largo" (mixed voices, 20 cents). From the same publisher comes "Youth Sings," a delightful 96-page book containing a variety of two- and three-part arrangements of songs that will appeal to teen-agers (\$1.25).

Shawnee also has published solo versions of two of this columnist's songs—"Jonah and the Whale" (the whale's side of the story) and a semi-religious number, "You Can Do Anything" (with the Lord by your side)—selling for 40 cents each.

Hall & McCreary, Chicago, have a new 96-page booklet of two-part sacred choruses for treble voices under

the title "Unto Thee We Sing." It contains 28 hymn and anthem arrangements for the average choir and sells for 60 cents.

Recent releases from Canyon Press, East Orange, N. J., include Lovelace's "Peace I Leave with You" (SATB, 22 cents), which lacks the flow of his more familiar "Carol of the Mother," and "Choral for Sunrise," arranged by Hobbs for a brass ensemble (50 cents).

Carl Fischer, New York, has two new anthems in Mueller's series on the sayings of St. Paul: "Think on These Things" (mixed voices, No. CM6711, 20 cents) and "Singing with Grace in Your Hearts" (mixed voices, No. CM6710, 20 cents).

Harold Flammer, New York, has these Christmas releases within the range of average choirs: "Little Christ Child Sweet and Holy," by Williams, a unison carol that children will enjoy (No. 86078, 18 cents); and a four-part, mixed-voice setting for "The Babe in Bethlehem's Manger Laid," by Beudendorf (No. 84190, 20 cents).

Flammer likewise has prepared new printings of the short cantata by Richter, "The Birth of Christ," for mixed as well as three-part women's voices (30 cents), and of Nobel Cain's "The Lord's Prayer," for mixed voices (18 cents). Incidentally, the solo setting for "The Lord's Prayer" composed by this reviewer's father, the Rev. S. K. Emurian, Norfolk, Va., over 40 years ago is still in demand, as it is suited to accompanists and soloists of average skill. The latest printing sells for 50 cents.

The year 1955 will mark the 100th anniversary of the birth of Francis Bellamy, the Baptist minister who wrote the original Pledge of Allegiance to the American flag. Looking to this event and in view of the recent act of Congress which added the words "under God," this columnist has composed and printed a new musical setting for these words under the title "The Pledge of Allegiance" (25 cents). Prepared primarily for students, the song incorporates a theme from the six most famous patriotic songs in American history—"Yankee Doodle," "America the Beautiful," "America," "The Star Spangled Banner," "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and "Dixie."

No Uncertain Sound

IN the current literature on preaching there is a refreshing return to primary sources. The theological and biblical interest, which some have thought to be confined to professional circles, is making itself felt definitely in homiletic writing. The preaching art is presented, not as a branch of public speaking, but as the communication of the Word of God, as revealed in Scripture, to the needs of men in our time. There are still books enough which offer little more than cribbing sources for the unimaginative preacher; but the ones we welcome are those which help a man to a deeper understanding of the nature of preaching, and to a fuller performance of his function. Four recent books well represent this creative movement through homiletic literature, the main accent in all of them being upon preaching as the transmission "of the Word of God, through the written word, by the spoken word," to the needs of men today. They are the kind of books which help to bring theology and biblical scholarship from the professor's study into the pulpit and from there into the life of the church.

★★★**PREACHING.** By **Walter Russell Bowie.** 224 pages. Abingdon, \$2.75. This is a solid and comprehensive treatment of the whole field from definition to delivery. Dealing with methods of sermon planning and preparation as well as content, the author throughout holds the reader to the high view of preaching as God-centered and Christ-centered, biblically grounded and theologically informed. The book will likely be in wide use as a text in the seminaries, and will also give the experienced preacher a renewal of faith in his vocation and practical instruction in more effective performance.

THE TRUE AND LIVELY WORD. By **James T. Cleland.** 120 pages. Scribners, \$2.50. Matching its title, this is a true and lively book. All five of its brief chapters are about the Word, treating in turn, the Words of the Bible, the Word of God, the Word of the World, the Word and the Words of the Preacher, and the Word of the Believer. The seriousness of theme is in no sense modified by the direct, even entertaining style of the author. The book will be of much help in strengthening and clarifying the preacher's witness.

★**FIRE IN THY MOUTH.** By **Donald G. Miller.** 160 pages. Abingdon, \$2.50. Five short chapters all deal with the place of the Bible in preaching. The work shows easy familiarity with contemporary trends in biblical scholarship and interpretation and a fine sense of the practical needs of the preacher as interpreter of Scripture to lay congregations.

★★**PREACHING THE WORD WITH AUTHORITY.** By **Frederick W. Schroeder.** 128 pages. Westminster, \$2.50. Here is sounded the note which all true preaching requires, but which is lacking in times when Scripture and theology are neglected. The author warns against unwarranted claims to authority in the preacher's private wisdom or inherited dogma, yet avoids the opposite error of those who confuse an open mind with lack of conviction. No preacher may claim that his words are the Word of God, but every true witness is a channel of the authority that begins and ends with God.

GEORGE MILES GIBSON.
McCormick Theological Seminary,
Chicago, Ill.

ROUNDUP

THE GREATEST GIFT. By **Mary Miller.** 128 pages. Revell, \$2.50. Published separately at first, these one-page stories of Jesus have been collected into one attractive usable volume, illustrated with Harold Copping pictures—over 50 of them. The book is organized with 7 stories each under titles like: Jesus Came; Stories Jesus Told; Jesus the Healer; People Jesus Met. The printed material meets the reading ability of fourth grade. It could be well used on a browsing table

(★★★★You can't afford to be without it; ★★★Unusually valuable to the preacher; ★★Above average in its field; ★A good buy; No Star, depends on your taste and need.)

in the primary department or the junior. It would be an excellent book for parents or older children to read to little people.—*Donald F. Irvin, Chicago Lutheran Seminary, Maywood, Ill.*

PEACE AND POWER WITHIN. By **Willard L. Russell.** 308 pages. Prentice-Hall, \$3.95. A successful Texas lawyer, educator and rancher, the author outlines a system of effective living based on a formula, RPC—essential religion, applied psychology and common sense. His careful analysis of reflective thinking and of inner power, engendered through belief, carries conviction; he lays bare the "why" as well as the "how" of self-realization. Much more thoughtful and thorough than many similar books aimed at personal achievement. The clergyman will find numerous insights to stimulate his work as preacher and counselor.—*Kenneth Hildebrand, The Central Church of Chicago.*

A TREASURY OF THE KINGDOM, by **E. A. Blackburn.** 280 pages. Oxford University Press, \$3.50. This book by the headmistress of Walthamstow Hall in Sevenoaks, Kent, England, is not just another anthology of quotations for "too-busy" preachers. Its contents are intelligently selected from a wide range of sources. For instance the first few pages bring quotes from Erasmus, Nehru, Sir Richard Livingstone, Plato and Toynbee. Materials are classified under these headings: Approach to the Kingdom, Festivals of the Kingdom, The Fruit of the Kingdom, Servants of the Kingdom and The Kingdom Perfected. In addition to its value to the sermonizer, this anthology offers stimulating reading guided by a uniquely capable compiler.—*Amos John Traver, Hamma Divinity School, Springfield, Ohio.*

Books Preachers Are Reading

October	November	This Month	An analysis based on reports from leading religious booksellers and from the reading of the Pulpit's distinguished editorial associates and book reviewers.
	4	1	The Old Testament and the Fine Arts. Cynthia Maus. Harper, \$5.95
	9	2	Preaching. Walter Russell Bowie. Abingdon Press, \$2.75
	6	3	This Do and Live. Roy M. Pearson. Abingdon Press, \$2.00
2	1	4	The Household of God. Leslie Newbigin. Friendship Press, \$2.75
1	2	5	The Christian Hope and the Task of the Church. World Council. Harper, \$5.00
	8	6	Jeremiah. Elmer A. Leslie. Abingdon Press, \$4.75
		7	Who Speaks for God. Gerald Kennedy. Abingdon Press, \$2.50
		8	Like a Mighty Army. Halford E. Luccock. Oxford, \$2.50
		9	The Teaching Ministry of the Church. James D. Smart. Westminster, \$3.00
		10	The Hope That Sets Men Free. Howard Conn. Harper, \$2.50

Pulpit Paragraphs

Contributed by Readers of The Pulpit

TO understand Christmas adequately it is necessary to have in our minds two Christs: the Christ of history and the Christ of experience.

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King"—that verse tells us of the

Christ of history. Add to this statement Paul's words: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me"—that tells of the Christ of experience. Both ideas of Christ are required for a complete gospel. A vital religious faith is achieved only when the Jesus of history becomes the Christ of experience.—*Ray Freeman Jenney, Bryn Mawr Community Church, Chicago, Ill.*

• The Lost Chord

THE root of the human problem, yours and mine, is that we have sung our own song even while singing the Gloria in Excelsis. Our song has been, "Glory to man in the highest, for I am the master of things." We have glorified ourselves and have only indulged in a polite "tipping of the hat" to God. We humans crave glory, some kind of splendor that may clothe our lives with meaning, significance and purpose. But it is easy, treacherously easy, to miss the real thing. If Jesus is right, our ideas of what makes for glory in life are wrong. With us it means power or success, fame or position. It means applause from our fellowmen. It means seeking for admiration, for credit, for great accomplishments and great ideas. The tinsel of earthly glory fascinates us. We have glorified competition in the business world, which frequently ruins men in their struggle to get to the top of the ladder. Thomas Gray put it well when he wrote, "The paths of glory lead but to the grave." For whatever else it is, all the glory which we seek serves only to exile God from our lives. And if God is an exile in the life of any man, that man is a stranger to himself and to his fellowmen. For we can understand ourselves and find our highest glory only in and through God.—*John G. Simmons, St. Matthew's Lutheran, North Hollywood, Calif.*

• The Christmas Party

HOW shall we celebrate Christmas? For a great many people this question will raise no problem. Following the customs established by their families over many years, thousands of homes are filled with a satisfaction and peace they would neither

change nor exchange for anything in the world. That is good. We can thank God for it.

There are indications that we have an uneasy conscience about the "Christmas" observed in some other places. Did you see the magazine article in *This Week* entitled "The Drunken Christmas Party—a Growing Christmas Scandal"? In one New

that many parties are decent and enjoyable, truly expressive of the camaraderie that has existed throughout the year, but they are growing less in number, with "a pronounced trend toward heavier drinking and friskier activity." The time has come for all of us who have a voice and an influence to speak up with conviction.

It is encouraging that some offices are making the Christmas party an event to which the families of employees are invited, not excluded. There are gifts for the children and the little ones get a great joy out of seeing the place where daddy (or mother) earns the daily bread. Others are making the office celebration an occasion for entertaining the orphaned and underprivileged. This annual event can be made something of which to be proud, not ashamed, if executives, salesmen and secretaries will couple a Christian conscience with a Christmas imagination.—*H. Victor Kane, First Baptist, Niagara Falls, N. Y.*

• The Book We Love

THERE is the oft-told story of a preacher who was visiting in a home near his church. He was talking in the living room to the lady of the house and decided to read some scripture before he left. He asked for a Bible, and the woman, wishing to impress the minister, called to her young daughter, "Honey, go in the bedroom and bring Mother that book we all love so much." The little girl skipped off and soon returned, not with the Bible, but with the Sears and Roebuck catalog. No wonder our youth are asking, "Where in the world is God?"—*William M. Holt, Hanover, Vt.*

• Putting Christ Into Christmas

EARLY in December each year my children prepare a lovely creche as a part of their Christmas activities. Along with a star and a stable, there are dogs and donkeys, wise men and camels, shepherds and sheep, Mary and Joseph; but these are always grouped around a manger with a baby in it. As an experiment, I have tried rearranging the scene by removing the manger and Christ Child. When I do that the whole scene becomes pointless. I put back the empty manger, and still there is no significance to the arrangement of figures. There is no way to restore the meaning of the Christmas scene except to put the Christ Child back into the center of it.—*Clifford Ford, First Methodist, Watsonville, Calif.*

Pulpit Calendar

Dec. 5—2nd Sunday in Advent.

Dec. 12—3rd Sunday in Advent.

Universal Bible Sunday.

Dec. 19—4th Sunday in Advent.

Dec. 25—Christmas.

Dec. 26—1st Sunday after

Christmas.

Dec. 31—New Year's Eve.

Jan. 1—New Year's Day.

Jan. 2—2nd Sunday after

Christmas.

Jan. 3-10—Universal Week of Prayer.

Jan. 6—Epiphany.

Jan. 9—1st Sunday after

Epiphany.

Jan. 16—2nd Sunday after

Epiphany.

Jan. 16-22—Church and Economic Life Week.

Jan. 18-25—Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (World Council of Churches).

Jan. 23—3rd Sunday after

Epiphany.

Jan. 30—4th Sunday after

Epiphany.

Jan. 30-Feb. 6—Youth Week.

Feb. 6—5th Sunday after

Epiphany.

Feb. 13—6th Sunday after Epiphany. Race Relations Day.

Feb. 20—7th Sunday after Epiphany. Day of Prayer for Students.

Feb. 20-27—Brotherhood Week.

Feb. 23—Ash Wednesday.

Feb. 25—World Day of Prayer.

Feb. 27—1st Sunday in Lent.

(Pulpit Calendar lists dates in the calendar of the Christian year and other observances of national or religious significance.)

York company where the preceding year the "party" became a brawl which had to be broken up by a crew of janitors, the president was asked if another such event was planned. "Not on your life," he replied. "The office Christmas party has become something that everyone anticipates with dread, suffers through, and remembers with horror. This is one office that has had its last party."

Many will unwittingly or unwillingly find themselves part of such celebrations and wonder what can be done about it. We know, of course,

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THE EDITOR'S PAGE

The Book of the Month

ETERNAL HOPE. By Emil Brunner. Westminster Press (1954), \$3.50.

TOO many preachers, I fear, are reacting to the eschatological theology which dominated the Evanston Assembly of the World Council without taking pains to understand it. This theology had no competitor on the program. American liberalism was silent. The differences among the speakers represented "more or less" rather than "for or against" it. This movement of thought can be said to have begun with Schweitzer's discovery in the early 20th century that the mind of Jesus and of Paul moved in the eschatological dimension. This had, for a time, a staggering effect upon the prevailing moralistic understanding of the ethics of Jesus by transforming his teaching into an "interim ethic." Thus its effect was to cut the ground from under the prevailing social gospel with its idealistic conception of social progress toward a utopian Kingdom of God realizable in history. The resistance of American liberalism to this view has continued to our time. Meanwhile, European and most British theologians have accepted, in principle, the eschatological view of the entire Bible and capitalized it as the very substance and essence of the Christian faith. It is this movement which burst in a dramatic and powerful impact upon American thought at Evanston. If we would understand this theology, there are two questions that must be answered. First, is it true that original Christianity was eschatological in its faith and hope? I believe it has been abundantly proved that the eschatological hope was inseparable from the faith of the first Christians and the gospel they proclaimed. Second, was its eschatological character merely a form or mode of thought conditioned by a pre-scientific cosmology, and therefore to be ignored or discarded in order to get at the inner essence of the Christian faith? I believe our minimum response to this question must be that of an open mind.

I WISH to suggest several books which provide an answer to the first question. John Marsh's *The Fullness of Time*, Oscar Cullmann's *Christ and Time*, John Bright's *The Kingdom of God*, Paul S. Minear's *Christian Hope and the Second Coming*. These books show, each in its own way, that the Bible is through and through eschatological—that is, concerned with the Beginning (creation), the Center (in Christ), and the End of the world in its time dimension. To answer the second question I suggest three books. From Reinhold Niebuhr's *Faith and History* you will learn that the problem to which Christian eschatology gives a unique answer is not uniquely a Christian problem, but is the master problem with which

philosophy has wrestled for centuries, and today more acutely than ever. Thus the biblical answer is set in a context broader than the Bible and made relevant to modern man. In John Baillie's *The Belief in Progress* you will find much surprising historical knowledge of the way this idea of straight-line progress emerged (and only recently) in Western thought and why it has now become untenable. The third book, also answering the second question, is that of Emil Brunner whose title stands at the head of this page.

LIKE Niebuhr and Baillie, Brunner is concerned with the question of communicating this biblical faith to modern man. The Christian message will not seem realistic until it is seen as relevant to man's condition and experience. Brunner's book is lucid, sober, readable, and the most recent contribution. It also gives an exposition of the eschatological character of the New Testament. Therefore, if you can buy only one book, I recommend this one. Brunner sees our era as a "post-Christian" era. Western culture is uniquely characterized by the fact that it once believed in Christianity but has become disillusioned. We have, he says, substituted various forms of the idea of progress for the biblical ideas of the Kingdom of God and eternal life. These substitutes are now shown to be unrealistic and empty. Literature, art and philosophy, and contemporary history itself, testify to the widespread sense of meaninglessness in human existence resulting from the acceptance of these substitute hopes. Because these false hopes seemed to be sanctioned by Christianity, and sustained by a Christian apologetic in the form of early 20th century liberalism, Christianity itself is the object of disillusionment. "And now the final consequences in nihilism stand fully exposed with terrifying brutality and clearness." Thus Brunner sets biblical eschatology in the empirical context of man's present condition. To the preacher, then, I say that, if he is persuaded by the biblical outlook, he must know it in this context or his message will not be communicable. He will seem to be merely revamping an outmoded dogmatic biblicism. But if he is not persuaded by its biblical exegesis, and does not know its empirical context, he will be resisting it without understanding. Which leads me to say that the professor of what we used to call "homiletics" in our theological seminaries must be more than a preacher; he must also be a theologian with at least a preacher's heart in him. Only such teachers can produce preachers able to communicate the gospel to our perplexed and disillusioned generation.

Charles Clayton Koonian

For the Record—

OUR readers should find the sermon in this issue by Josef L. Hromadka of special interest. To begin with, it is one of the few sermons published in this country from beyond the iron curtain. Further, it was preached during the World Council's Second Assembly to the congregation which worshiped in Evanston's Unitarian Church, whose pastor, Homer A. Jack, is an editorial associate of *The Pulpit*.

Of still further interest is the reflection that this sermon is a sample of the kind of bridge-building Christians are attempting to do in today's tragically divided world. This was undoubtedly one of the enduring benefits of the World Council's Evanston meeting.

Fellow Christians

Members of the press at Evanston were deeply impressed by the warm manner in which delegates from communist countries were welcomed by their fellow delegates. As the Assembly proceeded it became clear that these men from communist-related nations were present, not primarily as apologists for a certain political or economic system, but as *Christians*. Perhaps it was in recognition of this fact that Professor Hromadka received one of the most intense and spontaneous ovations given to anyone by the Assembly. This response was one of the highlights of that Assembly and came when the chairman made this significant statement: "We cannot control what takes place outside of this hall, but we can determine what happens within it."

In the light of these comments, many of our readers may want to re-read the Hromadka sermon. What would an American preacher have said in like circumstances to a congregation in Czechoslovakia? Does Christianity have enough inner spiritual power to produce those adhesive qualities which will be able to hold the world together? Was John Oxenham right when he wrote, "In *Christ* there is no East or West"? What is the mission of the church amid the tensions of our divided world?

The Council's Answer

The World Council tried to answer some of these questions. Perhaps this statement from the Assembly's report on international affairs (Section 4) points the way:

Because of their belief in this gospel of reconciliation and their experience of its power, Christians can never accept, as the only kind of existence open to nations, a state of perpetual tension leading to "inevitable" war. On the contrary, it is the Christian conviction that war is not inevitable, because God wills peace.

From this it follows that the first responsibility of Christians is to live and work for the reconciliation of men to God and, therefore, as individuals and nations, to one another.

A.M.M.

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